MARGINS OF THE MIND

Frank Musgrove

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Frank Musgrove

with the assistance of
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Methuen & Co Ltd

Author's note

The material on which the arguments of this book are based is principally the transcripts of tape-recorded interviews which were carried out under the author's general direction as follows: Chapters 3, 6 and 7 by Pat Hawes; Chapters 4 and 9 by Roger Middleton; and Chapters 5 and 8 by Frank Musgrove. The responsibility for the conception and design of the study, for the selection and organization of the material, and for the interpretation and speculation that appear in this book, rests solely with the undersigned.

F. Musgrove.

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Psychology and stability

Psychologists generally see adult identity as finished and relatively closed; some contemporary sociologists see it (at least in advanced modern societies) as endlessly open and even peculiarly conversion-prone. Deep-seated change in adult life occurs especially, they think, in the 'marginal situations' which abound in a complex, pluralistic world. For most psychologists adult identity is massively stable; for many contemporary sociologists it remains endlessly fugitive. It is always fragile and precarious, and modern man is a chameleon.

This is a book of seven ethnographic case studies of change in adult life. Its purpose is to make a contribution to our understanding of the problems and processes of adult resocialization. Change is examined principally in terms of a modification of consciousness. The seven groups of people selected for study had moved into unusual, extreme or abnormal positions in contemporary English society. Their positions could be described as 'marginal'. The focus of this book is the modification of consciousness in adult life through the experience of marginality.

Two groups were selected for study because they have been placed in marginal positions through misfortune: they are men and women who have gone blind in adult life, and people who have contracted incurable physical disabilities and entered a Cheshire Home. Other groups of people who have taken up their marginal positions from choice were selected for comparative purposes: self-employed artists; late entrants to the Anglican ministry; a Sufi commune; Hare Krishna

devotees; and (although the notion of choice is somewhat problematic) adult homosexuals. These groups were studied in order to suggest an answer to the question: Can adults really change?

The view that adults cannot 'really change' (unless, perhaps, they undergo a prolonged course of psychoanalysis) is a very dispiriting conclusion for anyone concerned with the re-education of adults in either 'developing' or rapidly changing modern societies. And it is because of the author's long-standing interest in the problems of 'marginal men' and lifelong learning[1] that the studies reported in this book were undertaken. The production of retreads for changing fields of industrial employment is a comparatively minor, technical problem for 'l'éducation permanente'. The current debate on continuing education is conducted in a context of profound ignorance of the ways and circumstances in which adults can 'really change' when life calls for deep-seated and creative readjustments and perhaps radical redefinitions of self and reality.

For we have no psychology of adulthood in the sense in which we have a child psychology.[2] It is true that we have some systematic knowledge of the adult years from demographic data (we know that as we grow older we are more inclined to suicide and less inclined to crime); and simple (and sometimes misleading) 'directory research' tells us something about the peak years of achievement in different fields of endeavour.[3] Psychologists have mapped out developmental stages for the first fifteen to twenty years; but thereafter life is a blank. Half a century of adult life remains psychologically speaking, an unchartered waste.

Some attention has been given to the social and psychological significance of the menopause (and its importance as a stage in the life-cycle of women greatly de-emphasized[4]); but there are few well-established psychological landmarks in the forty years after twenty. Sociologists have not made any systematic contribution to studies of the life-cycle, and even those who have been interested in age-classification as an aspect of social structure have little to say about the fifty years between youth and old age.[5]

The psychologist's 'stages' are usually based on the work of Piaget and Freud. They end abruptly with adulthood and 'maturity'.[6] Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning extend into the twenties,[7] and Keniston, drawing on Kohlberg's work, sees a post-conventional morality marking a new stage of the life-cycle for some (mostly highly educated) people in post-modern societies, interposed between adolescence and full adulthood: 'a previously unlabeled stage of

development is opening up.' [8] Only a minority will ever achieve this post-adolescent but pre-adult stage, which is characterized by adherence to personal principles, often stated at a very high level of generality, and frequently involving conflict with existing concepts of law and of the social contract. A prolonged period of disengagement from the institutions of adult society appears to facilitate this level of moral development. It is from this 'stage' that the adherents of the counter culture (in both its activist and mystical forms) appear in the main to be drawn.

But there has been little advance on Erik Erikson's tentative exploration of adult change and development more than twenty years ago. Erikson gave us eight ages of man: five related to the first twenty years of life, three to the remaining fifty. Indeed, his eighth stage ('ego integrity versus despair') is the stage of 'maturity' and appears to extend over the whole of life after thirty.[9] Erikson's stages are defined by conflicts which have to be resolved before the next stage can be reached: they are steps which are predetermined in the growing person's readiness to interact with a widening social sphere, but are 'encouraged' by society to unfold at their proper rate and in their proper sequence.

The case for the stability and continuity of adult personality rests not on stages and sequences that have been explored, but on general theories of personality and the evidence of longitudinal follow-up studies. The interests and values of 'gifted' Californians have been followed up for half a century and show remarkable stability;[10] 'deeper' personality characteristics at thirty have been shown to be substantially the same as twelve years previously — though the experience of war, marriage and adult careers had intervened.[11] Benjamin Bloom's celebrated and highly influential recent study points in the same direction. Bloom's collation and interpretation of extensive research on stability and change generally confirms the picture of massive continuity, although Bloom concedes that this is not necessarily 'natural' and inevitable, but may be a reflection of a stable social environment.[12]

Sociology and flux

For the 'symbolic interactionists' all is openness and flux: adult identity is provisional and tentative, open to far-reaching 'transformation' and redefinition. Identity is produced, sustained and transformed by the fleeting patterns of human interaction.[13]

The author has elsewhere discussed the psychological stage as a social invention;[14] and others have pointed to its significance as a social rather than a psychological fact.[15] This book does not attempt to establish psychological stages for the adult years: it examines change not as the outcome of maturation, but of socialization. But it does not dismiss 'stages' as having no reality or explanatory value. The materials in this book are used to comment on stage theories where this is appropriate. In particular, the account of the two religious communes (Chapters 8 and 9) are interpreted in part as manifestations of Kohlberg and Keniston's stage of post-conventional morality.

Socialization is the process by which men are moulded by their society and the social relationships in which they are involved. A distinction is commonly made between primary socialization in the early years of life, principally in the family, and subsequent secondary socialization into an occupation, marriage, parenthood and community life. Through primary socialization the individual apprehends a reality which appears inevitable and has 'a peculiar quality of firmness';[16] secondary socialization, to be effective, must be congruent with this first conception of the world. The process of socialization has often been conceived (following the seminal writing of G.H. Mead) as the learning of social roles. 'Mind presupposes and is a product of the social process', said Mead; and through language and play the young child enters society by 'taking the role of the other'.[17]

G.H. Mead was at one with Freud in emphasizing the importance and permanence of these early childhood experiences; but the neo-Meadian 'symbolic interactionists' of recent years focus attention on later stages of life and see socialization as much more provisional. Indeed, there is about it an artificiality which seems to make change not only relatively easy but perhaps desirable. Berger and Luckmann describe primary socialization as 'the most important confidence trick that society plays on the individual ...'[18]

Artifice, staginess and collusion are central to Goffman's conception of self. Personal identity is a conspiracy, the individual defines himself and his situation with the provisional agreement of others who are prepared to suspend disbelief while he gives his 'performance'. In this dramaturgical conception of social roles the self is not immutable, but depends on 'agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured'.[19] But 'performances' are not merely theatrical pretence: 'the very structure of the self can be seen in terms of how we arrange such performances in our Anglo-American society.'[20]

Sociologists reject the notion of socialization as an inexorable unfolding which leads to completeness or maturity. Ethnomethodologists reject this deficit view of personal development: when they enter into the social world of the child (or anyone at an 'inferior' or 'lower' stage of development) they find a culture which is entirely meaningful in its own terms; and change arises not from development to a higher stage, but from culture contact. Attention shifts from long-term sequences to short-term interaction with another culture.[21] Parents and teachers are enjoined to treat children not as incomplete adults but simply as cultural strangers.[22]

The emphasis among both ethnomethodologists and symbolic interactionists is upon a greater openness of individuals to change. Psychologists talk of personality development; more dramatically symbolic interactionists talk of transformations of identity. Unlike 'development', transformation does not imply sequence or change in any particular direction, towards some defined state of maturity, completeness or fulfilment; it is intended to capture 'the open-ended, tentative, exploratory, hypothetical, problematical, devious, changeable, and only partly unified character of human courses of action.' [23] Psychologists with a psychoanalytical orientation may emphasize not only basic stability but deny any 'real change' at all: apparent changes are merely variations on a theme. By contrast interactionists explore the ever-shifting 'situational adjustments' of social life and argue that stability (or change) need not rest on interests, values and deeper personality traits, but simply on 'structural' circumstances — by which is meant social rewards and punishments, the 'coercion' of people by circumstances. Commitment, it is conceded, may indeed impede behavioural change, but commitment is unnecessary;[24] and in a modern pluralistic world we are all chameleons.[25]

The importance of marginality

This is Peter Berger's view: in modern highly diverse (or pluralistic) societies, if men are not chameleons, they are at least conversion-prone. Modern man invites and experiences fundamental transformations of identity. The influential sociological writing of Berger has elaborated this central theme for a decade. It is Berger's key propositions about modification of consciousness and change in adult life that the present study was designed to test.

In a series of striking and very popular books Berger develops the theme that in modern societies identity is open, precarious, fragile,

liable to fundamental transformations. These can happen 'with fright-ening speed', thus 'The intellectual becomes a slob after he is kidnapped by the army'.[26] Modern man is singularly conversion-prone,[27] but 'To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to go on taking it seriously ...'[28] Identities are socially bestowed, but 'They must also be socially sustained, and fairly steadily so'.[29] This is one of Berger's key propositions which is tested and examined in this book.

Berger's notions of adult change and transformation of conscious-ness are closely related to his conception of 'marginality'. (When people move into marginal positions, as many do in complex societies, familiar props for their identity are lost.) Indeed, the concept of marginality, after an inconclusive history following the pioneer writing (in the 1920s and '30s) of Stonequist and Park,[30] has assumed a new significance in recent years in discussions of socialization. It is perhaps people in marginal situations — in the anterooms of life — who are most open to change?

Three different lines of sociological thought converge today to highlight the importance of marginality in studies of personal change. In the early years of this century Emile Durkheim's sociology of religion dealt with the social bases of the sacred and the profane: the home and origin of the sacred was the 'effervescent', non-routine or marginal phase of social life.[31] Arnold Van Gennep distinguished three main phases or stages in rites of passage: rites of separation, marginality (or liminality), and finally aggregation to a new condition, or reaggregation to the old.[32] In more recent times Schutz's pheno-menological approach to the sociology of knowledge has posited multiple realities, with marginal realms or 'sub-universes of meaning' surrounding, challenging and subverting the paramount reality of everyday life.[33]

Three very popular contemporary writers draw respectively on these distinctive sociological traditions to develop further the idea of marginality: Mary Douglas draws heavily on Durkheim,[34] Victor Turner on Van Gennep,[35] and Peter Berger on Schutz.[36] But they are alike in emphasizing the potency and transfiguring properties of marginality. Victor Turner and Mary Douglas draw on exotic anthro-pological data, but Peter Berger's highly dramatic view of marginality — with its promise of terror and ecstasy — is based on observation of ordinary, everyday life in the West.

Few would nowadays subscribe to the psychological notion of 'marginal man' as a distinctive personality type; but the marginal

position, which is ambiguous, not fully institutionalized, and removed from what most people would see as society's central institutions and values, has considerable utility.[37] The marginal situation can be defined subjectively (in the phenomenological perspective of Schutz) as people experience it from inside: it is change from a former position which was accepted as self-evident and normal, which was taken for granted, and presented itself as not in need of further analysis. Change to a marginal position brings into question three basic ingredients of reality: time, typicality, and preconstituted (recipe) knowledge. Marginal situations, at least when first encountered, make time, types and recipes problematical.

The former normal position was firmly anchored in time, like the 'proper' stage of life or career; but now temporality is disordered, or life is lived by a different timetable or clock. And in the marginal situation no-one fades into the background, anonymous, typical: events, relationships and people cannot be unreflectingly noted, absorbed and dismissed. And formerly trustworthy recipes which were reliably used for interpreting and manipulating the world no longer work. The marginal situation calls for new recipes, timetables and types; and they too may finally appear self-evident constituents of a congealed reality.

Seen objectively, from the outside, change from one position to another is far from abnormal: it is in fact a constant of social life; but some changes are of an unusual order of magnitude. Social positions stand close into, or further removed from, society's 'centre', which may be defined as Shils has defined it, in terms of values and power. [38] It is where most people — and according to Shils a growing number — spend most of their everyday adult lives. But marginal positions stand off to a degree that is discontinuously greater than the ones next in line. And at the centre of contemporary Western societies there is heterosexual marriage, secular employment in industrial-bureaucratic organizations, and good health.

For Peter Berger marginality is first and foremost a threat to man's primary socialization, and for Victor Turner and Mary Douglas it has comparable powers of transfiguration. It was their assertions regarding the potency of marginality in adult resocialization which prompted the studies reported in this book.

Thresholds symbolize the beginnings of new statuses, new ways of feeling and action; and in Western society the bridegroom traditionally carries his bride over the threshold of their new home. Mary Douglas and Victor Turner draw on a wealth of more exotic

anthropological data to argue, after Van Gennep, the significance of liminality or the threshold state.

Mary Douglas draws heavily on her fieldwork with the Lele of Central Africa and illustrates the power, danger and essential ambiguity of marginality in the treatment of the pregnant woman and her unborn child: persons in a marginal state 'are people who are left out of the patterning, who are placeless ... their status is indefinable.' [39] (Mary Douglas also follows Durkheim in his view that concepts — of time, causality and space — are modelled on the shape, boundaries and margins of society, and develops the thesis of the symbolic replication of the social state.[40] This book alludes to his theory where appropriate, but does not claim to use it or to test it.)

Victor Turner draws on his fieldwork with the Ndembu tribe and illustrates the concept of marginality (or liminality) from the installation rites of their chiefs. The liminal or threshold state of the chief-elect is one of abasement, and yet it is one of danger and power: 'The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these people elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space.'[41] But Turner agrees with Mary Douglas that liminality is charged with remarkable power: 'The powers that shape the neophytes in liminality for the incumbency of new status are felt, in rites all over the world, to be more than human powers, though they are invoked and channelled by representatives of the community.'[42]

The rites of passage that Van Gennep described were ritualized, with clearly defined and elaborate behaviour for everyone involved: they were means of control, of maintaining order in perilous conditions of transition, and of ensuring an entirely predictable outcome for the individual who had embarked upon the passage. But Victor Turner elaborates the stage of liminality as a semi-autonomous zone of social reality, and his account of it is very similar to Shutz's 'enclaves' of experience which are full of concrete, immediate, idiosyncratic encounters and devoid of 'typifications'.

For Turner liminality expands into what he calls 'communitas', an unstructured, counter state or phase of social existence: 'Essentially communitas is a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals. These individuals are not segmented into roles and statuses, but confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber's "I and Thou".'[43] It is not a state of incompleteness or repression, but of liberation and fulfilment. 'Spontaneous communitas

has something magical about it. Subjectively there is a feeling of endless power.'[44] Turner recognizes that in fact 'Communitas itself soon develops a structure':[45] even the reality of anti-structure becomes congealed. But above all, he claims, this unstructured side of social experience — and in our own times Turner instances such marginal groups as the hippie and digger communities of California — produces not segregation and belittlement, but a sense of oneness with humanity.

Peter Berger's conception of marginality is no less dramatic, but he arrives at it by a different route (through a phenomenological approach to the sociology of knowledge) and locates it in a more familiar, everyday world of assistant managers in ladies' underwear departments, and the like. But for Berger marginality is ecstasy — literally *ek-stasis*: standing outside the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life. Marginality is what surrounds the 'middle ground' of ordinary existence. To move into the margins is to experience ecstasy. It is also to experience terror. For '... all human societies and their institutions are, at root, a barrier against naked terror.'[46]

Margins are still related to the centre — they are not an utterly separate sphere; and Berger gives considerable attention to the 'overarching symbols' which bracket or embrace both marginal and central realms. 'What is particularly important, the marginal situations of the life of the individual (marginal, that is, in not being included in the reality of everyday existence in society) are also encompassed by the symbolic univers.'[47] This symbolic order enables the person in the marginal situation to regain a foothold in sanity which always, in Berger, seems to be slipping away. Marginality is conceived as crisis, and the 'purest' example is being confronted by death.

> But even when the world of everyday life retains its massive taken-for-granted reality *in actu*, it is threatened by the marginal situations of human experience that cannot be completely bracketed in everyday activity. There is always the haunting presence of meta-morphoses, those actually remembered and those only sensed as sinister possibilities.[48]

Marginality of this melodramatic kind is a threat to the very primary socialization of men. A minor shift in the definition of reality would suffice for a man to go to the office without his tie; only a major shift would enable him to go in the nude.[49] But such major shifts are the very stuff of true marginality which is a powerful agency of

resocialization. It is the source of counter realities and identities when it is experienced in sub-worlds in which it is possible 'to build for oneself a castle of the mind in which the day-to-day expectations of society can be almost completely ignored'.[50]

It is important to note that Berger makes no distinction between involuntary (and stigmatized) marginality, and marginality which is voluntary (and high status). The only basic requirement appears to be permanence. When 'counter individuals' such as cripples, lepers, bastards and idiots congregate in socially durable groups, there occurs 'a more complex distribution of knowledge', new societies are constructed on the basis of deviant and detached definitions of reality, and counter identities are born.[51]

In spite of the massiveness of the 'taken-for-granted', marginality appears to be omnipresent and powerful. There are rituals to assuage even while they represent the terror of the margins. But marginality is not simply terrifying; it is liberating and transforming:

> Both in practice and in theoretical thought, human life gains the greatest part of its richness from the capacity for ecstasy, by which I do not mean the alleged experiences of the mystic, but any experience of stepping outside the taken-for-granted reality of everyday life, any openness to the mystery that surrounds us on all sides.[52]

In Berger's writing socialization and marginality are quite explicitly linked within a historically specific social context. Berger's ideas of marginality and the 'openness' of personal identity even in full adult life are tied closely to the circumstances of complex modern industrial (and secularized) societies. The distinctive and relevant feature of such societies is their 'pluralism'. Earlier, more unified societies are contrasted with 'the plurality of life-worlds in which the individual typically lives in a modern society'.[53]

One of the basic and characteristic divisions in modern life is between the public and the private: private life seems to be seen by Berger as a form of marginality, a separate reality, a realm of discrepant meanings, in which traditional religion, plucked from the public sphere, and new and exotic cults may be found. It is in these 'interstitial areas', Berger suggests, that new and satisfying identities may be formed.

Modern societies are not mass societies, as an extensive sociological literature argued twenty years ago; they are marked by an extreme division of labour and diversity of life-styles and values. There are diverse systems of honour, and socialization stresses proficiency rather

than commitment. It is in these conditions of modern pluralism, argued Berger, that personality even in adult life is susceptible to sudden and deep-seated change:

> Modern identity is peculiarly open ... Not only does there seem to be a great objective capacity for transformations of identity in later life, but there is also a subjective awareness and even readiness for such transformations. The modern individual is not only peculiarly 'conversion-prone'; he knows this and often glories in it. Biography is thus apprehended both as migration through different social worlds and as the successive realization of a number of possible identities. The individual is not only sophisticated about the worlds and identities of others but also about himself. This open-ended quality of modern identity engenders psychological strains and makes the individual particularly vulnerable to the shifting definitions of himself by others.[54]

It is the two key propositions embedded in this passage — that modern identity is ever poised for transformation, and that modern man is highly sensitive and responsive to the shifting definitions of himself by others — that the studies reported in this book are concerned to test.

An inquiry into the transformation of consciousness

The case studies reported in this book were undertaken as inquiries into the 'transformation of consciousness'. The aspects of consciousness which were selected as relevant to this study were principally those on which Peter Berger focuses our attention (especially in the book, *The Homeless Mind*). They are six in number: rationality, secularization, temporality and future-planning; the sharp separation between the public and the private, and a comprehensive stock of reliable recipe knowledge.[55]

The world which supports these aspects of consciousness is experienced as a normal and plausible world: within it the individual makes sense of his life in terms of rational, rule-regulated conduct of affairs; decisions taken with little reference to divine assistance; a life-plan which is constantly reviewed and revised; timetables which order and mark the steady and uniform progression of time; and established recipes which enable the usual routines of life to be lived with the minimum of conscious reflection; and a private world where he can 'really be himself'. These six aspects of consciousness are both

the structure of plausibility and the source of modern identity.

They are subverted by marginality. Marginal situations were selected for this study because they were expected to subvert at least one of these props of modern consciousness. The blind and the disabled residents in a Cheshire Home were selected principally because it was envisaged that their former recipe knowledge would be useless and their structuring of time would become acutely problematical. Parsons and artists were chosen partly because they were not 'at home' in a secular, industrial and rational-bureaucratic society, but also because, in the daily conduct and organization of their lives, the distinction between public and private spheres seemed likely to be ill-defined, and their non-bureaucratic careers might change their ordering of time. The homosexuals were selected because their socio-sexual 'typifications' were likely to be shifting and ambiguous, and because in their own homosexual world social recipes which had worked on the 'outside' might have a more dubious utility. The two communes — the supreme manifestation of the contemporary demodernizing impulse — seemed likely to subvert all the six major components of modern identity. They were selected primarily because they clearly run counter to the modern secularized consciousness and (most explicitly in the case of 'Krishna Consciousness') were quite deliberately and systematically concerned to transform the consciousness of modern Western man.

The fieldwork (shared by the author and his two research assistants) was carried out in 1974 and 1975 through participant observation and extended, very lightly structured interviews. The (tape-recorded) interviews were usually carried out in the homes or institutions of the respondents and lasted for two or three hours. Interviewees were invited to talk about their lives, explaining what had led up to their present situation; to say in what ways their lives had changed, and what they felt they had lost or gained from the change. They were asked whether they now made distinctions of any kind which formerly they could not have made, or whether distinctions they had formerly made now seemed unimportant or invalid. They were asked whether the things they considered important had changed. Questions were directed towards social relationships and to their daily activities and routines. They were asked what they looked forward to and whether they felt in any way cut off from life. Replies were generally full and circumstantial; they were also very thoughtful, and great care was taken in disentangling changes in outlook and circumstances that might have occurred in any case, simply through growing older, from

changes that could be directly attributed to moving into the 'marginal situation'.

Of course people may lie. Or they may elaborate their stories. And less deliberate distortions are equally possible. Anselm Strauss has written about the 'management' of personal histories, and points out that 'Each person's account of his life, as he writes or thinks about it, is a symbolic ordering of events'. [56] But aspects of a life will be ordered either by an external observer or the person who lives it, if it is to make sense. The rapport established with interviewees seemed sufficient assurance that they were not telling lies; and it was the whole point of making this study to re-order and interpret the ordering of life as it was presented by the subjects. The 'inside view' of respondents is given as extensively as possible; but the terms in which they told their stories, the categories they chose to talk about themselves, provided clues to their current self-conceptions and important changes that might have occurred. When a paralyzed man of fifty who had not worked for more than twenty years talked about himself as a truck driver, his choice of categories for describing himself seemed to indicate a real sense of continuity in personal identity. The interest then lay in accounting for such change or continuity: and the subject's social context and his relationships with immediate, 'significant others' were expected, in the light of neo-Meadian social psychology, to offer the key.

Conclusion

To go blind in adult life; to be stricken by multiple sclerosis and enter a Cheshire Home; to leave work in a mill to become an artist, or work as an engineer to become a priest; to accept that one is a homosexual; and to enter a commune of Eastern mystics — all are changes of considerable magnitude and even high drama. It seemed likely at the outset of this inquiry that all would provide evidence of major transformations of identity in adult life.

They did not. The evidence of these studies suggests that adults are capable of more fundamental change than many psychologists will admit; but that 'consciousness', 'identity' and 'the self' are far more resilient and resistant to change than important contemporary schools of sociology and social psychology will concede. We are not, in fact, chameleons.

But there are endless and obvious pitfalls in studying and talking about 'real change' and the 'essential self'. 'Real change' is a question

not only of magnitude and direction, but of what it is precisely that is changing. It is possible to have significant change in behaviour without corresponding changes in values and meanings one gives to the world; and values and meanings may change although corresponding behavioural changes are impossible.

With all due caution, and in the light of all the evidence presented in this book, the author suggests that 'real change' from a former self occurred in five of the seven groups that were studied. The change was greatest and most dramatic in the case of the two communes and the homosexuals.

But significant change can occur less dramatically and suddenly, incrementally, by accretion, scarcely noticed, but steadily cumulative over many years;[57] the parsons especially, but also the artists, provided evidence of marked continuity in self-conceptions, and yet they 'really changed'.

The parsons had not experienced 'conversion' but had usually changed many of their priorities since they became parsons; and they had abandoned rational life-planning while listening for signals of transcendance (even though these often came to them through the machinery of the ecclesiastical bureaucracy). The artists in their intensely private worlds often stood on the brink of personal dissolution, and sometimes went over.

The blind and the residents of the Cheshire Home are remarkable for the persistence and continuity of their self-conceptions over many years and even decades of extreme and grievous 'marginality'. Finding new recipe knowledge does not necessarily sustain a new reality: it supports and even strengthens the old.

The studies also disabuse us of the simplistic view that some social psychologists hold that assuming new 'roles' means creating a new self.[58] All the people in this study had moved to a new status and a new role, but 'real selves' often remained latent though undimmed and available for recall. All new roles in modern life do not involve personal transformation: the post-parental stage of the life-cycle, which is a novelty of our times, clearly does not involve remaking oneself, but subsiding thankfully and comfortably into being one's 'real self' after twenty years of unremmitting child care.[59] 'Real selves' may be saved up and carefully maintained for forty years awaiting retirement — as in the case of one of the artists described in this book. Retirement is well worth a study as the phase or stage of life when 'real selves' are disinterred after fifty years of camouflage.

The 'consciousness' with which this book is concerned is a

relationship between the observing, knowing and reflecting self and the surrounding social world: it is the sense a man makes of his experience, the terms in which he defines himself and his circumstances. Consciousness changes when this relationship between self and social experience is reinterpreted and seen in a new light: when what was formerly taken for granted, unremarkable, scarcely visible, becomes obtrusive and problematical, when old and well-worn distinctions and categories lose their usefulness and new typifications and definitions are brought into play. These changes (it is claimed by contemporary subjective or idealist schools of sociology) are 'negotiated' as men creatively respond to the shifting circumstances and relationships of life: they try out and test their new ways of presenting themselves and accounting for what befalls them, and new 'negotiated realities' are accomplished as they enter into new inter-individual transactions and accommodations.

But new typifications and categories can be minimized and isolated, accommodated to old structures of meaning, leaving former definitions of the self and the world substantially intact. Of course some modification of consciousness occurs when a housewife goes blind and henceforth divides mankind into two basic categories: the sighted and the blind; and when a schoolmistress contracts multiple sclerosis, suffers extensive paralysis, and now typifies herself as 'just a nuisance'. But what is remarkable is the extent to which such modifications of consciousness can be contained: the blind housewife denies that her husband deserted her because of her blindness; and the paralyzed schoolmistress negotiates with her nurses that she is not 'just a nuisance' after all.

Even extreme marginality does not lead easily and automatically to the dissolution of an estbalished self and a fundamentally reconstructed reality. Intellectuals who are kidnapped by the army are in fact unlikely to become slobs, at least at the speed and with the inevitability that Berger imagines. Common sense suggests that people who find themselves in marginal and stigmatized situations against their will are likely to strive for 'normality', but that those who turn deliberately to a new life are more likely to change. This book supports this common sense conclusion.

But there are complications. 'Transformations of identity' are most apparent in three groups described in this book: the members of the Sufi and Hare Krishna communes and the homosexuals. While members of the communes have voluntarily embraced their marginality, voluntariness is a less clear-cut notion when applied to the

homosexuals; and while members of the communes have no doubt that they are a spiritual elite, the homosexuals are deeply aware that they are still severely stigmatized people (and a prison record may be a less serious social disability). But unlike the other extremely marginal and stigmatized groups (the blind and the paralyzed), the homosexuals actively and creatively negotiated new selves and definitions of the world.

Psychologists' stage theories of personal development were briefly considered above, and a limited role suggested for them in accounting for transformations of identity. The response to marginality probably varies with age, and in particular the voluntary and semi-voluntary movement into marginal situations and interest in reformulating the relationship between self and society, may characterize developmental stages in early adult life. The Sufis, the Krishna devotees and the homosexuals who decided to accept their homosexuality were predominantly in their twenties. The possible explanatory value of stage theories of development is examined in the final chapter of this book.

2 | Orientations to the centre: passing and coming out

The idea of 'marginality' overlaps the ideas of 'subculture' and 'sect'; but it does not, like the latter, necessarily imply religious commitment; and it does not, like the former, necessarily imply shared values and an organized set of social meanings. But in their varying relationships to the 'centre' marginal positions, subcultures and sects pose similar problems of sociological analysis.

Peter Berger often uses the notion of marginality in a way that is indistinguishable from subculture. The marginal world of a leper colony may indeed develop subcultural characteristics, but it would be difficult to talk about a subculture of the blind. Nevertheless, the problem of the relationship of marginal position to 'centre' is similar to the problem of the relationship of subculture to culture and of sect to society. When does a subculture (for instance of blacks) become a social movement?[1] When does a revolutionary sect (like the Quakers) become 'introversionist'? When do marginal people who may have hitherto tried to 'pass' decide to 'come out'?

Sects have been classified according to their response to the world and a distinction drawn, for example, between introversionist, revolutionary and utopian sects.[2] This is not a ready-made classification to be applied to marginal positions, but varieties of marginality can be distinguished by the same criterion. A simple four-fold classification would distinguish between 'convergers', 'quietists', 'utopians' and 'separatists'.

The convergers play down, hide or deny any real difference between their position and the centre: thus the blind often tried to pass as sighted, and the parsons declared that they were 'ordinary folk' and