

Jeff Heath and David Morgan (eds.)  
MEN, MASCULINITIES AND SOCIAL THEORY

CHAPTER 11 London: Unwin Hyman, 1990

# Male perception as social construct

LEONARD DUROCHE

In this chapter I would like to raise some questions about three separate but interrelated problems, which if not queried thoroughly – which is impossible in a brief presentation – are at least hovering ominously about on the edges or in the background as I go about other things. The first, of course, is the matter of perception and the question whether its foundations are exclusively located in structures of the mind and the body or whether cultural factors also play a role. There is, I believe, considerable evidence for the latter position. The second question inserts the gender issue into the discussion and asks to what extent perception, so understood, is not gender-neutral, but gender-specific. The third issue, which will have to be dealt with largely by implication, has to do with the consequences for hermeneutics – for example, to use my own field, literary study, what does that mean for readers and writers and for the act of interpretation? What I am currently trying to explore in my own research is the kind of literary connections made between feeling and knowing and the extent to which there are in literary texts gender differences in the way the senses are cultivated, particularly as metaphors for knowing. I will not get that far in what I try to unfold here, but that is at least the direction in which I am headed.<sup>1</sup>

What I am about to undertake then is the attempt to frame a question: what are the issues that need be raised, how might one go about investigating the extent to which the perceptions have a history? And if they do and if gender position is a factor in that history, how much of it can be recovered and where might one look? Perception is seen then as a part of 'body language', a

[170]

ESTUDIOS DE GÉNERO U.N.A.M.  
MALE PERCEPTION AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

B. D. G. 00100

semiology of the senses that is at various times cultivated or ignored. Accepting the phenomenological evidence that there is such a thing as bodily/emodied knowing as well as abstract knowing, the connection I wish to make here is between the body and knowing, *how* the body knows, how that knowing has been moulded by social and political forces at different times and in different places, and what part the gender of the knower – or more accurately, the social control and regulation of the gender role – has played in historical forms of perception.

My query is stimulated by and based on the recent discovery that the human body has a history, that how the body has been viewed has changed enormously over time, that the changes in how the body has been viewed have had less to do with new developments and discoveries in science than with changes within the social order, that in fact social change has often seemed to have had the effect of encouraging science to produce empirical and phylogenetic evidence that will support social policy (Weeks 1985, p. 177). One of the best entries into the newly emerging history of the body is the excellent collection of essays from a wide range of fields edited by Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur under the title of *The Making of the Modern Body*. The combined effect of individual efforts in a number of disciplines, partly historical, partly anthropological, partly psychological and medical, has worked together with 'social historians' deepening interest in culture, with 'the nomenclology', and with a new awareness of the significance of gender in literary and cultural analysis, to produce a quite different picture of how we live and breathe and do all those other bodily things (Gallagher & Laqueur 1987, p. vii).

Beginning somewhere in the 18th century a major reinterpretation of sexual difference began to take place. As Gallagher and Laqueur state it, 'the reinterpretation of women's reproductive biology solved ideological problems inherent in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social and political practices' (Gallagher & Laqueur 1987, p. viii). A part of that history that still has not been written is how the reinterpretation and reformulation of perception and the senses played a part in this reinscription of the body and whether the transformation of perceptual emphases, practices, and patterns served, or at least reinforced, the same kinds of essentially ideological purposes.

[171]

There are strange and contradictory developments in this revolutionary rewriting of sexual difference that I can only point to in the present context, but which pose questions for further investigation. There is the paradox, for example, of the feeling-unfeeling woman. At the same time that the modern notion of woman was beginning to assign to her an increased responsibility for emotional life in the psychological division of labour that takes place within emerging bourgeois capitalism, a view of the female body developed that saw it/her, if not as a machine, at least as driven by mechanisms of a more or less automatic and cyclical nature that would take care of the important business of providing progeny,<sup>2</sup> with little or no need for gratifying any sexual feelings she might have, though it was doubted she had any (Laqueur 1987, pp. 1, 30, 35).<sup>3</sup> Alongside this there also occurred a narrowing and reduction of male sensibilities. The more uninhibited expression of male emotions characteristic of the age of sentimentality, of *Sturm und Drang* and early Romanticism, with their emphases on strong and close, often deeply intimate, male friendships, is replaced in the 19th century by a muting of the emotions, a transforming and often dulling of male perceptual awareness, and an increasing homophobia.

What I find particularly interesting in all of this is that in a period in which almost obsessive attention has been paid to the female body, the male body has often seemed invisible, in fact, unimportant. As Rosalind Coward, (1984, p. 227, quoted in Lehman 1988, p. 91) has said in writing about contemporary cinematic use of this heritage:

Under this sheer weight of attention to women's bodies we seem to have become blind to something. Nobody seems to have noticed that men's bodies have quietly absented themselves. Somewhere along the line, men have managed to keep out of the glare, escaping from the relentless activity of sexual definitions.

As Peter Lehman (1988, p. 105) has argued, also talking about film: 'Traditional patriarchal constructions of masculinity benefit enormously by keeping the male body in the dark, out of the critical spotlight. Indeed, the mystique of the phallus is, in part, dependent on it.' But has the male body escaped definition? I want to take issue here with Stephen Heath who contends that there can be no

[172]

male equivalent to the lived, embodied discourse of women, 'telling the truth about one's body' (Heath 1987, p. 25), though up until now most of the evidence has been on his side. A lot has been written about the changing spaces of men and of women from the 18th century to the present; I mention Donald M. Lowe's *History of Bourgeois Perception* as just one example. I propose that we begin to take a look not just at social space in the way that is usually understood, but at perceptual space as well, at visual space, auditory and olfactory space, and how the perceiving gendered subject at the heart of that space is transformed as the space is transformed. But before getting into those issues, let me turn to why the body, at least the female body, suddenly became so very important towards the end of the 18th century.

As Thomas Laqueur has indicated (1987, p. 2 and *passim*), the human body was, for all practical purposes, until well into the 18th century, taken to be an ungendered, generic body. The male body was indisputably the norm. But the female body had all the parts of the male; they were simply rearranged, outside-in, deformed. Woman was an inferior man (Laqueur 1987, p. 2 and *passim*). The revolutionary shift that took place somewhere in the 18th century was that a model of hierarchical difference, based on homologies between male and female reproductive systems, began to crumble and an 'anatomy and physiology of incommensurability replaced a metaphysics of hierarchy' (Laqueur 1987, pp. viii, 3). Londa Schiebinger's fascinating historical study of the first medical illustrations of the female skeleton in the 18th century lends further credence to Laqueur's contention that no one cared about 'anatomical and concrete physiological differences between the sexes until such differences became politically important' (Laqueur 1987, pp. 3f.). And the reason why they became important had to do with one of the great dilemmas of Enlightenment egalitarianism. As Laqueur indicates, the human body inherited from antiquity presented the body politic of liberalism with a nasty conundrum, namely, how - given Enlightenment beliefs in universal, inalienable, and equal rights -

to derive the real world of male dominion [over] women . . . from an original state of genderless bodies. The dilemma, at least for theorists interested in the subordination of women, is resolved by grounding the social and cultural differentiation of

[173]

## MEN, MASCULINITIES AND SOCIAL THEORY

the sexes in a biology of incommensurability that liberal theory itself helped bring into being. A novel construal of nature comes to serve as the foundation of otherwise indefensible social practices. (Laqueur 1987, p. 19).

Thus it is perhaps not surprising that the 'new biology' appears at precisely the time when the foundations of the old social order were irremediably shaken' (Laqueur 1987, p. 16). That the body, especially the female body, has come to occupy a crucial position for us in political discourse is clear (Laqueur 1987, p. 1). But what about the male body?

To answer this question we need to consider some other issues. Though they cannot be examined in detail here, the following issues need to be kept in mind in thinking about the deadening of the male body and the transformations of male perception: the transformation of the sense of space (including gendered space); the process of privatization (thus shifting from an emphasis on public/anonymous space to private/personal space); the growth of the bourgeois concept of the individual; and the requirements of the new emerging bourgeois-capitalist industrial order. Sensual perception is implicated in each of these categories and strikes me as a particularly suitable avenue to the examination of the redefinition of masculinity that has taken place since the Enlightenment.

Given what I believe is the importance of socio-historical factors in perceptual experience, there is an incredibly small scholarly literature devoted to the subject. It is as if there had been a plot *not* to call attention to the connection between perception and its socio-historical contexts, at least for adult males. There is not even any clarity on what the term means. Or perhaps there is. Electronic data searches of the sociological and psychological literature indicate what is most likely a patriarchal bias: get out of the body, get into the head! Most entries under the rubric *perception* have to do with attitude (for example, *self-perception*, *social perception*).<sup>4</sup> Perception does not mean 'What do I sense? What do I feel?', but 'What do I think? What do others think?' This undoubtedly reflects bourgeois embarrassment with the body. Almost from the moment when Baumgarten first invented the word 'aesthetics', which has to do with feeling, with sensory perception, western (mostly male) thinkers have been trying to negate, to transcend the body. Fortunately, from Rabelais and Voltaire to the present, the French,

[174]

## MALE PERCEPTION AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

at least, have not allowed us to forget it. There is a very fascinating literature, almost exclusively French, on the cultural history of perception. Much of it is based on the work of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, combining existentialist-phenomenological perspective with Marxist and/or Freudian cultural analysis. Although it poses only randomly and often only implicitly the question of gender, in so far as it critiques dominant western social practice, which is to say the practices of patriarchy, it is worth further examination. The major works, at least for our purposes, are the very early phenomenological study of Jean-Pierre Richard, *Littérature et Sensation* (1954), *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* by Jacques Attali (1985), and *The Fowl and the Fragrant* by Alain Corbin (1986). In what follows I need to order the senses. I am going to reverse the usual order and bypass the sense of sight, so often associated with the male and on which there is already a sizable literature, some of the best of which is in the area of film theory (for example, Kaplan 1983; see also Fox-Genovese 1987, p. 21, Benjamin 1983, p. 294, and Bucí-Glucksmann 1987, p. 222).

It was particularly in considering the way in which vision fails in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (*Verwandlung*) and the way in which Kafka calls attention to all the other senses that I began to attend to the portrayal of perception in male narratives. In a piece I have written on *Verwandlung* (Duroche 1987a) I have argued that attending to the senses other than sight enhances our chances of *hearing* multiple voices in the male text. It has become a cliché that men are middle-class American or West European male, no longer 'senses' a full range of choices for living a complete life, partly because he has narrowed his sensual contact with the world. As Richard Palmer has asserted, in the place of an openness towards the world and others the western male has privileged one or two senses and has withdrawn into a narrowly confined perceptual shell where correctness of perception is defined as correct *seeing* (Palmer 1969, pp. 142f.). The world eludes *man's* 'grasp' because *he* has cultivated only limited ways of connecting with or grasping it.<sup>5</sup> There is in linguistic usage a hierarchy of the senses in which seeing and feeling (touching) rank at the top as the most assertive, and smelling, hearing, tasting are considered more passive/receptive. Feel and smell are ambiguous in that they are more likely to represent acts or emanations of a subject, though all the senses can be construed as

[175]

either active or passive experiences. Traditionally, sight has been thought of as the 'male' sense. It is associated with distance, with cognition, with abstraction (cf. *vision*, German *wissen*, English *witness*). The ability to distinguish subtler sensual differences (for example, flavours and fragrances) has often been thought of as 'typically feminine'. Except for a few comments on sound/listening, I want to concentrate on what has often been thought of as the most primitive of the senses, the most animalistic, namely the sense of smell. Taste and touch I will have to ignore altogether as well as the question whether there is any correlation between the different cultivation of the perceptions among men and women and the patterns of dominance and submission that exist and/or are cultivated by each gender.

'Sound', as Jacques Attali tells us, 'is a way of perceiving the world. A tool of understanding.' He speaks of our refusal to draw conclusions from our senses, how the knowledge that is there is effectively censored. He thus emphasizes the urgency, the necessity of imagining 'radically new theoretical forms, in order to speak to new realities' (Attali 1985, p. 4). Listening is what men supposedly do least well. Our training has taught us to hear the sound of machines, the ping in the engine which our wives can never hear, but to block out the sound of people, children squabbling in the other room while we read the paper. Attali opens his book on noise with the marvellous phrase: 'For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible' (Attali 1985, p. 3). His examination of the politics of noise, controlled and organized noise, disruptive noise, and the institutionalization of silence, illustrates perhaps most forcefully that to regulate patterns of perception is to control probably the most crucial aspect of semiosis. Obedient conformist subjects hear what they are trained to hear, see what they learn to see, and so on through the other senses. Apprenticed to attend only to certain ranges of perceptual signals, a large part of experience remains quite literally 'meaningless' for me, in a sense does not exist for me.

Though Attali focuses on issues of social control, his emphasis is on class, rather than gender, race, or some other context of antagonism and domination. Yet the implications of his argument for gender studies are clear, and if he does not insert the gender

[176]

issue, Susan McClary, in her afterword to the English translation makes sure of doing so in her short discussion of the phenomenon of marginalization of discourse and her brief listing of contemporary composers who have refused 'to be silenced by the institutional framework, [and] who are dedicated to injecting back into music the noise of the body, of the visual, of emotions, and of gender' (Attali 1985, p. 157). A colleague of mine has used Attali's book in a seminar on the position of gays in current socio-political discourse to provide a theoretical model for understanding how the politics of gay liberation are defined by much of the mainstream heterosexual community as noise.

Attali underlines the connections of sound and knowledge, sound and power. He, too, deals with the process of privatization and the ways in which our modes of consuming electronic signals have cut us off from one another and increased our isolation. In moving from music as ritual, through music as representation, to music as repetition we have moved from collective communal consumption to the privatizing of listening, the best symbol of which is the Walkman, intensifying one more stage of our monadization.<sup>6</sup> Most important, he documents changes in the nature of listening. Combining his insights into the control of sound and silence, the power to legislate what noise is, with some implications of Bakhtin as mediated by recent feminist scholarship on attending to different voices in social discourse would seem to offer provocative and fruitful possibilities for gender studies. Dale Bauer shares the view of Patrocio Schweickart 'that "certain" (not all) male texts merit a dual hermeneutic: a negative hermeneutic that discloses their complicity with patriarchal ideology, and a positive hermeneutic that recuperates the utopian moment' (Schweickart 1986, pp. 43-4); cited by Bauer 1988, p. 19. See also Duroche 1987a, 1987b). She demonstrates how '[w]ith Bakhtin's dialogics, critics can theorize the process by which alien or rival social languages are excluded and silenced' (Bauer 1988, p. 6). Though the methodologies differ, curiously enough the impulses and the epistemological optimism behind writers otherwise as diverse as Bakhtin and Heidegger and his pupils are remarkably similar in that both camps hold out the possibility of going 'behind the text to ask what the author did not and could not say, yet which in the text comes to light as its innermost dynamic' (Palmer 1969, p. 147). Identifying the tension between controlling and letting go,

[177]

seeing and hearing, asserting and accepting, not assuming a finished and final reading as 'the sole object of interpretation', but rather nurturing an attitude that is 'creatively open to the as yet unsaid' (Palmer 1969, p. 147). Heidegger, too, suggests possibilities of recovering muted voices from beneath the dominant chords of conformity.

For the remainder of this paper I want to focus on the history of smell as it has been detailed, at least for 19th-century France, by Alain Corbin (1986), and try to pull together what I believe are some of the implications and conclusions of that very rich study for the developing field of gender studies. I shall begin by providing a map of the ground I intend to cover. At some point around the middle of the 18th century there suddenly appeared a new keenness in the sense of smell, an awareness of being situated in and oriented to the fine articulations of an olfactory space: Corbin speaks of the redefinition and lowering of the thresholds of tolerance. Evidence seems to show that then contemporary science, which was also beginning to change in the part it played in the shaping of public policy, had a great deal to do with this historical phenomenon. Though many of the theories of oosphresiology, the scientific study of smell, ultimately proved to be false, the 'new alertness to the olfactory environment within a very specific milieu: that formed by doctors, chemists, and reformist campaigners' (Corbin 1986, p. 56) had a crucial impact on the shaping of public attitudes and beliefs, so much so that even after the sensualist theories of the oosphresiologyists were discredited and were replaced by those of the more exact sciences of chemistry and the biological sciences, and after Pasteur had disproven the pathogenic nature of smell, many of the attitudes and beliefs remained. Considering the timing of this transformation, one notices that it began just before the major shifts of population distribution, thus is not initially attributable to increasing urban pollution caused by industrialization. However, it does overlap with the industrial revolution for much of its history and undoubtedly has a connection with the transformations of public and private space that came about in part because of the process of industrialization. It coincides also with the emergence of the bourgeoisie as the dominant social class and is also reinforced, if not 'caused', by the intensification of privatization in numerous areas of daily personal life, a process that is still with us, seemingly with no end in sight. It obviously has some connection with the

[178]

growth of the bourgeois concept of the individual and the development of a notion of private personal space, the space of the individual, as clearly distinct from public space, and it coincides with the concern for and redefinition of gender differentiation, which is amply documented in Gallagher and Laqueur (1987).

As far as where the history may be found for what Corbin has called an 'economy of desire and repulsion', 18th-century oosphresiologyists are probably the best place to begin. They demonstrate the almost official status of sensualist philosophy at the end of the century, the importance of the empirical evidence of the senses in the construction of knowledge, and they were obsessed with finding such evidence to support their hypothesis that the sexes, to name one opposition, could be distinguished by smell. The range of possible markers seemed to be: sex, age, race, class, with sex the most significant and class, at least initially, in the arena of public space, the least: 'no distinction was made between the smell of the poor and that of the rich; it was the crowd as such that was putrid' (Corbin 1986, p. 53). This was a clash of the personal space of the bourgeois (male) citizen, who increasingly thought of himself as an individual, and a public space which violated the boundaries of the Self.

By the eve of the French Revolution there was already a sizable literature, based in part on sympathetic theories, on smell as the 'sense of affinities' and 'the arousal of attraction or repulsion through personal odour' was a frequent literary theme (Corbin 1986, p. 53). The further progression of distinctions seems to have developed in the following manner: starting from an initial separation of public and private space, based in part on the fear of pathogenic qualities of smell, and from a gross distinction between the sexes, there began a long process of deodorizing public and then later private and domestic space, a process that has reached its culmination, if not apotheosis, in the United States. The cultural phenomena that are connected with this development are de-corporalization, especially the increasing disembodiment of male experience, the 'abstracting' of the senses, removing them from their link with our bodies. Corbin (1986, p. 229) reminds us that 'Kant excluded the sense of smell altogether from aesthetics. Physiologists later regarded it as a simple residue of evolution. Freud assigned it to analty' - an inheritance perhaps of the 19th-century obsession with sanitation, its fear of human waste and the increas-

[179]

ing privatization of its disposal, and the link between mephitism and infection, resulting in what he calls 'an apprenticeship in Hand in hand with the rise of the strong state responsible for maintaining and regulating public space was the rise of the concept of the individual, including the perceptual and perceived individual. This was and is an individual with not only more sharply defined political and psychological contours but of sensory contours as well. This explains part of the revulsion to the crowd: 'The fact that only stimulate repugnance to other people's odours' (Corbin 1986, p. 61). The pre-Enlightenment preference for musk, an animal fragrance, over vegetable fragrances, gave way to the notion of the delicacy of smell (Corbin 1986, p. 68), in fact, of the more delicate sensitivity, that is, of evidence of refinement, of the bourgeois male over the proletarian,<sup>8</sup> and there were many instances of the increasing suspicion of strong smells on men. There was likewise an out of the fear that something dirty was being covered up (Corbin 1986, p. 69), in part because of the importance of intensely experiencing the Self, 'revealing the uniqueness of the "I"' (Corbin 1986, p. 72), in part because 'of the much wider criticism of artifice, affectation, effeminate fashion'—in short, all the tendencies suspected of leading to 'degeneration' of the male—turning him into a woman. To that one can add the notion that 'perfume, linked with softness, disorder, and a taste for pleasure, was the antithesis of work... What disappeared or became volatile symbolized waste' (Corbin 1986, p. 69). This is but one more example of how transformations in many different areas of experience in the 19th century collaborated, at least in their consequences, to dull male perception, encapsulate men in unfeeling bodies, to dull male neglected and abused, and increased the sense of isolation, separability of men to detect subtle odours, fragrances, and aromas seemed to weaken and was passed on to women as part of woman's work, which was restricted largely to domestic space. The emphasis on private hygiene reinforced both the fear of physical contact and the repulsion caused by smelling another's body. Smell, and part in establishing models of behaviour and new codes of etiquette

[180]

(Corbin 1986, p. 73). Slowly these attitudes were passed on to the lower classes: 'The masses gradually came to feel the same repulsion. The new sensitivity reached that fringe of workers who spent their nights trying to escape being haunted by their involvement in manual labor' (Corbin 1986, p. 151), the odour of which they tried to scrub away:

The warm consolation of sleeping more than one to a bed had to be given up. Norbert Truquere, railway navy, felt his gorge rise when he breathed the odour of brandy and tobacco exhaled by his companions; forced to share his pallet, he confessed that he could no longer without repulsion tolerate contact with another man. (Corbin 1986, p. 115).

Balzac and others (for example, Emile Gaboriau and Guy Thillier) devoted considerable attention to the odours of masculine space, particularly offices, 'corrupted by emanations from the bachelors who people it' (Corbin 1986, p. 168), and college boardinghouses.<sup>9</sup> In a somewhat different context, writing about urban reactions to rural space and the smell of peasants, Corbin admits that almost all authors dealing with this period, including himself,

have rather naively used the copious discussions by bourgeois observers for their own purposes. It would have been more valuable if they had tried to unravel the tangled systems of images and, above all, shown that the basic historical fact was not the actuality (which had probably changed little) but the new form of perception, the new intolerance of traditional actuality. (Corbin 1986, p. 155f.).

As public space became purified, at least the portion of it reserved for bourgeois activities, and as the lower classes became somewhat less threatening for a more secure bourgeoisie (Corbin 1986, p. 157), certain aspects of proletarian experience were elevated and incorporated into the ideal of 'masculinity', and certain smells and signs signifying smell were revalorized. The ennobling of tobacco, workers, and sailors is such a case. Though the smell of tobacco had ranked earlier among the worst of odours, it was gradually accepted as an appropriate manly fragrance. Corbin argues that its ultimate victory as an acceptable sign of masculinity

[181]

also symbolized the victory of liberalism; it bore witness to increasing male domination of social life before it actually became its instrument. Like proscription, to which its spread was largely due, tobacco was decked with 'patriotic', egalitarian qualities. It was in this context that it earned its title to confraternity . . . rich and poor rub shoulders, without being surprised by the fact, in places where tobacco is sold, and only there. (Corbin 1986, p. 150, my emphasis).

As tobacco has been deodorized so, too, have two images of stench, at least for earlier generations, the sailor and, in America, bauchery there still today remains something exciting in the public mind, or at least in the mind of the advertiser, in these figures. To an urban society no longer required, for the most part, to earn its bread by the sweat of its brow, they, like the construction worker, represent male strength, hardness, and control. The total deodorization, sanitizing, and 'whitening' of these images is a signal of their unreality.

There are other developments in men's olfactory history during the 19th century that one could explore, but I hope I have made my point. There developed at this time a politics of smell.

Deodorization seemed to become a necessity with the emergence of bourgeois capitalism, which is to say, with the rise of the modern western form of the patriarchal state. The transformation of perceptions has attended the transformation of the social order. The bourgeois has so totally deodorized his world that he can no longer tell the difference between shit and Shinoa.<sup>10</sup> An historical phenomenology of male perception is needed to understand that and how men have been desensitized in the use of the other senses.

Given the persuasive evidence that gender position is indeed a constituent of hermeneutic activity, that a part of my historical reality is belonging to and coming out of a cultural experience that further articulates itself as a woman's culture and a man's culture, understanding, even at the fundamental level of perception, then it makes sense to attend to the senses in literary and cultural analysis. Though some sociologists may question using literary sources as equally valid documentation, in the absence of other kinds of

[182]

evidence there is little recourse but to consider our literary history, which is still one of the best documents we have, a kind of phenomenological record, not only of how we think, but also of how we feel or do not feel (for a defence of literature in the service of sociology, see Lepenies 1969, pp. 43ff; also Bernard & Schlaffer 1987, p. 71).

Because much that I have talked about has to do with gender-specific spatial experience, I believe one of the issues that still needs to be explored is the gradual shift of male space since the end of the 18th century from a homosocial to a homophobic space. One of the best explorations of that issue in a literary context is D. A. Miller's essay on sensation and gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*. He contends the west 'has routinely subjected male homosocial desire' to a kind of 'aversion therapy', the aim of which 'is not to redirect men's desire onto women but, through women, onto boys: that is to privatize homosocial desire within the middle-class nuclear family, where it takes the "normal" shape of an Oedipal triangle' (Miller 1987, p. 133). Weeks argues in a similar vein, citing Deleuze and Guattari: 'The Oedipal triangle is the personal and private territoriality that corresponds to all of capitalism's efforts at social reterritorialization. Oedipus was always the displaced limit for every social formation, since it is the displaced representative of desire' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 33; cited by Weeks 1985, pp. 173ff.).

I have pointed to some of the possible causes for the growing sense of separation and isolation among men. But there is much that is still puzzling. Why, for instance, did the sexes have such opposing reactions to the transformation of social space in the 19th century? As Judith Stacey has pointed out (1987, pp. 7, 24, and *passim*), the isolation of women in the home may have been quite ironically an impetus toward the development of a feminist solidarity during the 19th-century reorganization of family, social, and gender relations. Without wanting to indulge in conspiracy theories, I do want to suggest that the consequences have been the same as if a collective will had created the kind of personality that capitalist society required (see Weeks 1985, pp. 21f., 74), as if the threatening gathering of large numbers of men in the workplace had necessitated or somehow called into play societal mechanisms that led to the development of modes of discourse and interaction and fostered the homophobia that undermined any potential

[183]

collective male consciousness and possibility of male solidarity, a thesis which is strongly supported by many of the essays in Mangan and Walvin (1987), especially those of Seamans and Rotundo. Another way of saying this, suggested at least by implication by Barrett and McIntosh in their book *The Anti-Social Family*, is that the privatizing of homosocial desire within the family has drained all other social relations between men of much of their meaning or at least 'normality' (1982; see Weeks 1985, p. 42). The important issues to unravel and one avenue is to explore the role of feeling and the perceptions as part (a blocked part?) of a communication system between men, to explore the examples of and the barriers to male intimacy and friendship. To understand that even in our perceptual behaviour we are constituted as historical subjects in a process of instrumentalization is to recognize the possibility of structuring differently our subjectivity and, thus, our society.

## Notes

- 1 I gratefully acknowledge receipt of a grant from the West European Area Studies programme of the University of Minnesota, which made it possible for me to attend the conference.
- 2 I have already touched upon the problem in earlier projects. See Duroche 1987a, 1987b.
- 3 See Londa Schiebinger's comment (1987, p. 53) on the possible influence of 'Imperialist interests in population growth ... in the Foucault (1980, pp. 36f.) also posits the thesis of a strict utilitarian economy of reproduction under bourgeois capitalism.
- 4 In actuality the most contradictory arguments were put forward, ranging from those that equated menstruation with rutting and 'animal heat', to those that saw in women a 'superior capacity to transcend the brutish state'. In Laqueur's words, woman could be 'simultaneously a periodically excited bomb of sexuality and a model for the power of civilization to keep it from exploding' (1987, p. 30).
- 5 The source of searches was the PsycINFO database, which covers the world's literature in psychology and related disciplines, including Monographs, periodicals, dissertations, and technical and conference reports were searched for English, French, and German.

[184]

- 6 The differences between *physical seizure/control* and *mental 'catching'/ understanding* are blurred in the English 'gasping'. German insists on distinguishing between *greifen* ('grabbing'/'seizing'/'apprehending'), 'understanding'/'comprehending'), which is a mental activity.
- 7 Jessica Benjamin sees among the disastrous consequences of privatization, isolation, and rigid social control the urge to violate the boundaries, those of the Self and the Other, in order to experience 'losing the Self' (Benjamin 1983, p. 296).
- 8 Much of what Corbin says of the French applies to other western industrial countries as well. The later 19th-century witnessed the rise of sanitary obsession documented recently by the British television special programme 'On the Throne', a cultural history of sanitation and the flush toilet.
- 9 See Corbin (1986, pp. 140-1) on the unequal development of olfactory sensibilities along economic and class lines. The poor man smelled because he was not fully human: he had not crossed the threshold of vitality that defined the species' (Corbin 1986, p. 144). The analogy was extended to other 'sub-human' groups, women, particularly prostitutes, prisoners, and 'half-women' such as Jews and homosexuals (Corbin 1986, p. 145).
- 10 In note 31 to Chapter 10, 'Domestic atmospheres' (p. 276), Corbin writes: 'The importance of smells of this environment [the college boardinghouse] in the genesis of male sensitivity in the 19th-century cannot be overemphasized. Once again, repulsion was associated with accumulation of the mephitism of the walls, the social stench of the domestic staff, and the odour of the sperm of the schoolmaster and his masturbating pupils. This stench, perceived as male, sharpened desire for the presence of females.'
- 11 A popular American slang expression, referring to a well-known brand of shoe polish. Thomas Pynchon uses the expression in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in writing about the obscurity of the bourgeois room of the Roseland Ballroom where Malcolm X worked as a shoeshine boy (Pynchon 1973, p. 688).

[185]