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## The Mode of Desire

### Needs and Desires

Human beings are often thought to have needs because they have bodies. Our basic needs are thus typically seen as physical: the need to eat, sleep and drink is a basic feature of people or organic systems. It is also in social philosophy to recognize needs which are not overtly physical, for example the need for companionship or self-respect. 'Need' implies 'necessity', for the failure to satisfy needs results in impairment, malfunction and displeasure. The satisfaction of a need produces pleasure as a release from the tension of an unresolved need. The result is that 'need' is an explanatory concept in a theory of motivation which argues that behaviour is produced by the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. In Greek philosophy, the Cyrenaics and Epicureans placed great emphasis on the satisfaction of pleasures as a criterion of the good life. In utilitarianism, the notion of the hedonistic calculus became the basis of Bentham's political philosophy: the good society is one which maximizes the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The problem is that not all pleasures appear to be necessary and many of them appear to be destructive and anti-social. Human capacity for pleasures appears infinite, including self-flagellation, homosexual rape, torture, plunder and pillage. The philosophical solution has been to distinguish between good and bad pleasures, between real and false needs. For example, the outcome of the debate about pleasure and virtue in Greek philosophy was that 'we should try to live a frugal life in which necessary desires are satisfied, and natural but not necessary desires given some place, while vain desires are outlawed. Such a life would naturally be virtuous' (Huby, 1969: 67). While a person may gain sadistic pleasure from the pain of others, these pleasure-giving activities are not regarded as conducive to a good society based on companionship and these pleasures are thus regarded as vain and unnatural. There are at least two problems with this position. The first is that I am an authority on my own pleasures and therefore individuals may not be easily persuaded that their private pleasures are somehow false. Secondly, the argument equates 'desire' with 'need'.

Although the analysis of desire has a long history in philosophy (Potts, 1980) and although 'desire' is often associated with 'appetite', it is important to be clear that a theory of desire is not the same as a theory of need. For example, Freud's psychoanalysis was primarily a theory of desire

and cannot be translated into a Marxist anthropology which is essentially a theory of need. The difference is that need implies an object which satisfies the need, the object of the need being external to it; desire cannot be finally satisfied since desire is its own object. The view of desire provides the basis of Freudian pessimism, because desire cannot be satisfied within society. The Oedipus myth signals this impossibility. The satisfaction of needs can be the criterion of the good society, whereas the satisfaction of desire cannot. *Concupiscentia* and *ira* are thus corrosive of that friendship which the Greeks saw as the cement of social groups as well as the basis of individual virtue.

### Wisdom and Friendship

Sociology is literally the wisdom or knowledge (*logos*) of friendship (*socius*). The task of sociology is to analyse the processes which bind and unbind social groups, and to comprehend the location of the individual within the network of social regulations which tie the individual to the social world. While sociology is a relatively new addition to the social sciences, the notion that friendship is the ultimate social cement of large-scale social collectivities, like the state, is relatively ancient. In *The Symposium* Plato gave full expression to the Greek ideal of friendship as that social condition which overcomes the anti-social desires for personal possessions and competitive eminence. The aim of the individual and the state should be the cultivation of virtue and happiness rather than the satisfaction of desires which are the springs of disharmony and envy. The order (*kosmos*) within the individual is necessary to the ordering (*kosmios*) within the large social world and both are intimately connected to friendship. It was Eros which was the force capable of bridging the gap between the two essential elements of reality – rationality embodied in Apollo and irrationality embodied in Dionysus (Jaeger, 1944). The interior of the individual reflects the anatomy of society as a contest between desires (of which envy is especially prominent), and reason (Gouldner, 1967). Both Eros and friendship are necessary to fuse these disruptive and corrosive features of the psyche and society. We can see then that the roots of Western philosophy lie in two related issues: the struggle between desire and reason, and the opposition between the binding of friendship and the unbinding pressures of individuation.

There is much that separates Plato's philosophical enquiry into the nature of friendship and the sociological analysis of social bonding, but, as I shall show, there is also much continuity. More importantly, the world in which Plato existed has been transformed by two events which are crucial to this particular study: Christianity and the industrial revolution. Given the strong chiliastic dimension of early Christianity, the primitive church posed a sharp and decisive opposition between the world and the spirit. The cultivation of the body could have no place within a religious movement which was initially strongly oriented towards the things of the

next world. Early Christianity may have inherited from gnostic Essenism the view that creation was corrupt and worthy of moral condemnation (Allegro, 1979). After the destruction of Jerusalem and the absence of the Messianic Return, the Christian church was forced to accommodate to the existence of Roman imperialism, but it retained what Weber called inner-worldly asceticism, that is a strong hostility to the things of this world. To some extent the emphasis in Pauline theology on the sinfulness of sex was reinforced by the adoption of Aristotelian philosophy which was similarly hostile to women.

Within the Christian ascetic tradition, sexuality came to be seen as largely incompatible with religious practice. In particular, sexual enjoyment is a particular threat to any attempt to create a systematic religious response to sinfulness. This problem of subordinating sexuality to a rational lifestyle forms the basis of much of Weber's view of the origins of religious intellectualism and rationalization. The argument is that 'ascetic alertness, self-control, and methodical planning of life are seriously threatened by the peculiar irrationality of the sexual act, which is ultimately and uniquely unsusceptible to rational organization' (Weber, 1966: 238). One 'solution' to this dilemma of human existence was the division of the religious community as an elite which withdrew from the world in order to abstain from sexuality and the mass which remained embedded in the profane world of everyday society. The laity reproduced itself within the restrictions of organized monogamy. The elite withdrew into celibacy and monasticism, recruiting its members through vocations rather than carnal reproduction. Sexuality, even within the limitations placed upon family life by religious norms, was thus a lay activity, permitting monks and priests to follow a life of rational control over the flesh. As a result of this severity towards sexual sinfulness, the human body was transformed from the occasion for sin to its very cause. The body became the prison of the soul, the flesh became, in the words of Brother Giles, the pig that wallows in its own filth and the senses were the seven enemies of the mind (Black, 1902). To control the body, the ascetic movement in Christianity turned ever more rigidly towards rituals of restraint – fasting, celibacy, vegetarianism and the denial of earthly things.

### The Mode of Desire

It is possible to conceive of a mode of desire corresponding to every economic mode of production. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels (n.d.) argued that, within the materialist perspective of history, every society has to produce its means of existence and reproduce its own members. An order of sexuality thus corresponds to an order of property and production. The mode of desire is a set of social relations by which sexual desire is produced, regulated and distributed under a system of kinship, patriarchy and households. These relations of desire determine the eligibility of persons for procreative roles and legitimate sexual unions for

the production of persons. The mode of production of desire consequently has social, political and ideological dimensions; for example, sexual ideology interpellates persons as sexual objects with appropriate relations for the consumption of sexuality (Therborn, 1980). It can be argued that the mode of production produces social classes as effects of property relations (Poulantzas, 1973). Similarly, a mode of desire specifies a classification of 'sex groups', of which gender is the principal dimension dividing the population into 'men' and 'women'. However, the dominant sexual classification also designates 'boys' as subordinates who are not eligible for reproductive functions – they may be, of course, appropriate objects of desire. In modern terminology, we can suggest as an initial starting point that every mode of production has a classificatory system of sexual desire – a discourse which designates appropriately sexed beings and organizes their relations. It is this social discourse which specifies eligible sexuality not the dictates of human physiology.

Marx (1974, vol. 1: 85–6n) argued that in the feudal mode of production it was Catholicism which constituted the dominant ideology of feudal social formations. It is possible to re-express Marx's view by claiming that in a feudal mode of production there has to be an ideological regulation of sexuality corresponding to the specific economic character of feudal societies and that it was Catholic sexual discourse which provided the dominant mode of desire. Human agents live their sensual, sexual experience via the categories of a discourse of desire which is dominant in given societies, but this discourse of desire is ultimately determined by the economic requirements of the mode of production. The discourse has a grammar specifying who does what to whom and it is this grammar of sex which designates the objects and subjects of sexual practices. It is clear that this rendition of Marx is an attempt to bring together an Althusserian analysis of modes of production (Althusser and Balibar, 1970) and a Foucauldian outline of discursive formations (Foucault, 1972). This study of the body departs from these perspectives in two crucial features. The first is that both Althusser and Foucault have little to say in any detail on the resistance of either individuals or classes to forms of regulation and surveillance, despite frequent reference to resistance to discourse. Secondly, structuralist analysis of discourse either ignores the effectivity of discursive formations or takes their effects for granted. To show that a discourse is prevalent is not to show that it is wholly effective (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1980).

Every society has to reproduce its population and regulate it in social space; at the level of the individual, sexuality has to be restrained and persons have to be represented. These four problems may have a different prominence and salience in different societies depending on the nature of the economic mode of production. In feudal societies, especially for the dominant landowning class, the reproduction of the dominant class depended crucially on the regulation and restraint of the sexuality of subordinate members of the household. The conservation of land depended

on the stability of inheritance through legitimate male heirs; a discourse of desire was necessary to secure these economic objectives and this discourse was primarily patriarchal and repressive. These features of the discourse were contained predominantly within Catholic morality which aimed to repress pleasure in the interest of reproduction. This is not to suggest that mediaeval attitudes towards women were all of a piece; woman was both Eve (the cause of all our woe) and Mary (the source of spiritual power) (Bernardo, 1975), but the principal feature of the social position of women in feudal society was dependency and subordination within the household. In the seventeenth century, 'a roving woman causes words to be uttered' and this pronouncement applied to nuns as much as it did to married, noble women (Nicholson, 1978). A woman's place was next to the hearth with her master's progeny. This mediaeval discourse promoted legitimate sexuality and separated it from desire. Within this context, the confessional assumed especial importance (Hepworth and Turner, 1982); it was a ritual for the production of the truth of sex (Foucault, 1981), but to establish the truth of sexuality it had to understand the error of pleasure. Much can be learnt, therefore, about feudal sexual discourses by an analysis of the teaching of the penitentials on marital and extramarital coitus.

For mediaeval Christian theology, any act of coitus which did not result in the insemination of the woman was a 'sin against nature'. The sexual act was to be devoid of pleasure and therefore if a man enjoyed his wife the act was regarded as equivalent to fornication. These 'sins against nature' included not only sodomy, bestiality and masturbation, but also coitus interruptus. These were unnatural because they did not result in insemination and their primary motivation was pure pleasure. The same arguments applied to concubinage and extramarital sexuality, especially where these were undertaken with primitive contraceptive measures. The confessional manuals also proscribed certain sexual positions which increased pleasure and decreased the likelihood of conception. The condemnation of extramarital sex combined a variety of notions; it was associated with pleasure, with contraception and with unnatural positions. In addition, it implied that husbands would unwillingly become the parents of children whom they had not fathered. There was a danger therefore that property would pass to offspring who were not in reality legitimate. The order of legitimate sexuality would not correspond to the order of property relations.

It is very easy, as a result, to discover in these mediaeval texts a discourse of desire which separated pleasure from property. The sociological question is, however, to discover whether these discourses had real effects on social behaviour. Since it was impossible to form a household without sufficient capital, there are commonsense reasons for believing that young couples would adopt coitus interruptus for pleasure where procreation was economically precluded (Flandrin, 1975). Marriage was thus regarded as an economic and political contract between families for the conservation of a landowning class; the marriage bed was devoid of pleasure. Since procreative activities

were confined to these contractual unions in marriage, desire had to find its location elsewhere.

### **Asceticism**

In mediaeval times, the attempt to create a rational and systematic regimen of denial was largely confined to the religious orders who, as it were, practised asceticism on behalf of the lay man. Expressing this differentiation in spatial terms, reason was allocated to the internal domain of the monastery, while desire ran rampant in the profane world of the lay society. In this respect, we could perceive the principal argument of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) as an account of how the Reformation took the ascetic denial of desire out of the monastic cell into the secular family. Protestantism thus sought to break the distinction between the elite and the mass by transforming elite practices into everyday routines of self-control. Abstinence, the control of passions, fasting and regularity were thus held up as ideal norms for the whole society, since salvation could no longer be achieved vicariously by the labours of monks. The disciplines and regulations of the family, school and factory thus have their historical roots in the redistribution of monastic practices within the wider society. The monastic cell was installed in the prison and the workshop, while ascetic practices spread ever outwards (Foucault, 1979: 238).

Of course, the attempt to impose monasticism as a general secular norm of restraint necessarily led to resistances. The history of English sexual culture can be seen as a pendulum swing between restraints on sexuality and relaxations in moral behaviour. The Puritan revolution of the seventeenth century was followed, with the Restoration, by a new liberalism in sexual conduct. The return to a more rigid sexual life-style in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was followed by a new permissiveness which has been the dominant theme of contemporary society (Stone, 1979). To some extent these restraints on sexuality also corresponded to restraints on the table. From an ascetic point of view, eating and sexuality are both gross activities of the body. Eating, especially hot, spicy foods, stimulates sexual passion. To control sexuality, Protestants attempted to regulate the body through a regimen of dieting. The Puritan Revolution of the seventeenth century was thus also accompanied by a series of restraints on food, cuisine and consumption. Spices were banned and major festivals, such as Christmas, ceased to be occasions for secular enjoyment; the festivities surrounding Twelfth Night were also crushed. With the collapse of the Cromwellian era, the social revolt 'against Puritanism is shown in the excesses that took place at court. Often important banquets and entertainments were inclined to relapse into dissipated orgies, the honoured guests spattered in cream and other beverages' (Pullar, 1970: 128). While in the nineteenth century cookery became increasingly the object of domestic science, eating itself was still clothed with a certain Puritan prudery. Like sex, eating for

nineteenth-century women was something more to be endured rather than enjoyed.

Max Weber's sociology of Puritanism is normally interpreted as an argument about the ascetic origins of capitalism. In these introductory comments, it has been suggested that, more widely examined, Weber's analysis of Christian asceticism is in fact about the rationalization of desire. There were many dimensions to this process of controlling desires. Certain institutions were developed to subordinate internal passions to reasonable controls – monasticism, celibacy, monogamy, castration. Desires were regulated by routines – vegetarianism, dieting, exercise, fasting. The passionate side of human personality was subject to scientific enquiries, and technologies were developed to prevent various forms of 'self-abuse', especially in children. Human energy could be safely channelled through vocations. In the world the drive for sexual conquest was directed towards economic triumphs in business and commerce. Festivities, festivals and carnivals which were historically occasions for orgiastic release were originally suppressed by Puritanism and then prohibited by the routines of industrial capitalism. Public and collective festivals were gradually replaced by more individualized and private pastimes. In Weber's sociology of rationalization, there is the argument that the whole of life becomes increasingly subject to scientific management, bureaucratic control, discipline and regulation.

There are, however, at least two problems with Weber's analysis of capitalism. Asceticism provided a suitable cultural norm for capitalists who had to deny themselves immediate consumption in the interests of further accumulation. The requirement of investment for future profits precludes full enjoyment of present wealth. For the worker, it is different. Because they are separated from the means of production, they are forced to labour, to live under conditions of what Marx referred to as the 'dull compulsion' of their existence. The problem of capitalism as a system is, however, that there also has to be consumption of commodities otherwise the circuit of commodity capital becomes blocked and stagnates. With the growth of mass production, the rationalization of distribution in the department store and the post-war boom, capitalism also had to develop a consumption ethic, which in many ways is incompatible with the traditional norms of restraint and personal asceticism. Weber's account of capitalism ends with the arrival of early, competitive, capitalism in which desire is still denied in the interests of accumulation. Late capitalism, by contrast, is organized more around calculating hedonistic choices, advertising, the stimulating of need and luxury consumption. Late capitalism does not so much suppress desire as express it, produce it and direct it towards increasing want satisfaction.

The second problem with Weber's account is that while early capitalism transferred the monastery into secular society, it also bifurcated the secular world into a private sphere of use-values and a public sphere of exchange-values. Desire was relegated to the world of the intimate, private citizen, while the public realm became increasingly dominated by the norms of

rational calculation and instrumental knowledge. Such a division largely corresponded to the division between men and women, the latter being the vehicles of emotion, need and intimacy. There is, therefore, a social division of emotions which runs alongside the social division of labour, rendering women the custodians of the intimate and the private (Heller, 1982). This spatial division is, however, further disrupted by the increasing involvement of women in production, the transformation of the nuclear household and the decline of male-dominated, labour-intensive industries with the deindustrialization of late capitalism.

### **Desire and Reason**

The legacy of both Christianity and industrialization is the prominence of bipolar oppositions in thought and culture between the body and soul, the body and mind, matter and spirit, desire and reason. These classificatory oppositions are true not only of society, but of the basic forms of thought in Western culture and philosophy. It is not surprising that these distinctions should come to play a major part in sociological thought itself. Social thought has been modelled around the notion that human beings are simultaneously part of nature in so far as they have bodies and part of society in so far as they have minds. Social contract theories from Hobbes onwards resolved this dilemma by arguing that, as a rational animal, it was in the interests of men to form binding contracts in order to have security inside society. In forming contracts, men give up certain natural rights and submit to authority, whether in the person of the king or a government, to achieve some respite from the insecurities of their natural condition. The notion that civilized life requires certain basic restrictions and restraint has subsequently become a widespread tenet of sociological and psychoanalytic thought. Freud, for example, treated the incest taboo, a prohibition on sexual intercourse between affines and a resulting guilt complex in the Oedipus complex, as the original basis of social grouping:

The tendency on the part of civilization to restrict sexual life is no less clear than its other tendency to expand the cultural unit. Its first, totemic, phase already brings with it the prohibition against an incestuous choice of object, and this is perhaps the most drastic mutilation which man's erotic life has in all time experienced. ... Fear of a revolt by the suppressed elements drives it to stricter precautionary measures. A high-water mark in such a development has been reached in our Western European civilization. (Freud, 1979: 41)

Since Freud's attempt to analyse taboo as the basis of civilized life, both psychoanalysis and anthropology have reconceptualized totemism as a system of classifications. Language, not prohibitions, constitutes the division between culture and nature, but the same theme of desire versus power is central to much recent structuralist analysis.

Language is an impersonal system of communication in which we surrender our individuality. Language represents the authority of society



over the unconscious. Thus in the work of Lacan (1977) language is the basis of the alienation between the self and the world, and this alienation involves a division between the infinity of our desires, which are denied by social conventions, and the finitude of our demands which are allowed by society. Similarly in the work of Foucault, there is an opposition between power/knowledge which is localized in every authoritative institution and freedom/irrationality which is implicit in every deviant resistance. Madness had to be banished from the realm of reason by Descartes just as the mad have to be removed and confined in society. Fundamentally, the control of madness involves the control of passions. Foucault's quotation from François Boissier de Sauvages's *Nosologie méthodique* of 1772 neatly restates the classic opposition between desire and order:

The distraction of our mind is the result of our blind surrender to our desires, our incapacity to control or to moderate our passions. Whence these amorous frenzies, these antipathies, these depraved tastes, this melancholy which is caused by grief, these transports wrought in us by denial, these excesses in eating, in drinking, these indispositions, these corporeal vices which cause madness, the worst of all maladies. (Sauvages, 1772, vol. VII, p. 12, in Foucault, 1967: 85)

The imposition of reason over desire and the internment of the insane corresponds to a new apparatus of control in the asylum and a new horizon of knowledge in the sciences of man.

### Homo Duplex

Despite the trend in sociology to see all human attributes as the product of social determinism, sociology and social thought are often founded upon a concept of *homo duplex* in which the individual is a complex balance of asocial passions and social reason. For example, Durkheim, who is often regarded as the sociological determinist *par excellence*, also adhered to the model of double-man. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* argued:

Man is double. There are two beings in him: an individual being which has its foundation in the organism and the circle of whose activities is therefore strictly limited, and a social being which represents the highest reality in the intellectual and moral order that we can know by observation – I mean society. (Durkheim, 1961, p. 29)

The role of culture is to impose on the individual the collective representations of the group and to restrain passions by collective obligations and social involvements. Without cultural restraint, the individual is under certain circumstances driven by excessive expectations towards anomic suicide. The conservative dimension to both Durkheim and Freud is therefore the view that society is bought at the cost of sexuality. For Durkheim, that cost was both necessary and desirable. Since man is both a member of nature by virtue of being an organism and a member of society by virtue of culture, some solution has to be found to this Jekyll-and-Hyde duplexity. For Durkheim,

the restraint and regulation of man-as-body was to be found in the coercive nature of moral facts.

Although many social theories presuppose a dichotomy between mind and matter, soul and body or reasons and passions, their account of and solution for that duplexity are highly variable. While there is a theoretical link between Durkheimian sociology and modern structuralism, there are also important differences. For example, Foucault does not see power as always constraining; indeed he regards power as productive and enabling. Power does not so much deny sexuality as produce it for purposes that lie outside the individual. One feature of modern society to which Foucault draws attention is the idea that every individual, as a crucial feature of their social identity, must have a single, true sex. One has to be either male or female, since the hermaphrodite is a false or pseudo sex. It could have been imagined that what really mattered was 'the reality of the body and the intensity of its pleasures' (Foucault, 1980b: vii), but changes in law, juridical status, medical science and the administrative apparatus of society in the period 1860 to 1870 began to force individuals to have unambiguous sexuality. Behind the medical enquiries of the period, there existed a moral project that suggested people with dual sexuality were capable of indecency. While in contemporary society it is accepted that one may change one's sex, the notion that finally everybody must be either male or female is not dispelled. In this sense, it can be said that medical knowledge and medical power produce sex as a category of necessary identity rather than denying or removing it.

There are important indications in modern philosophy, especially phenomenology, that the traditional dichotomy of mind and body is false and in need of rectification. Whereas Cartesian philosophy set up an opposition between the body as a machine and the mind as rational consciousness, we cannot properly regard the body as an unconscious thing, since the body 'is both an object for others and a subject for myself' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 167). I both am a body and have a body, that is an 'experienced body'. Alternatively, much radical thought regards the opposition of body and mind as an aspect of social power, which subordinates desire to reason for purposes of authoritarian control. For such writers, the liberation of society presupposes the emancipation of the body and its passions from both psychic and social control. There is thus a long tradition of critical thought which advocates sexual freedom as essentially a political act of opposition. The critique of patriarchal power, the harmful consequences of sexual asceticism, the liberating character of pleasure and the denunciation of the element of prostitution in marriage have been themes linking together a wide variety of writers – Charles Fourier, Havelock Ellis and Wilhelm Reich. Although their positions are theoretically diverse, they are linked together by a certain eccentricity and utopianism – Fourier's communes and Reich's organismic box are clear illustrations of both. Of modern writers, Herbert Marcuse has provided a more coherent account than most of the denial of pleasure which capitalism allegedly requires.

### Play and Pleasure

Marcuse departed from much of the orthodox core of traditional Marxism by asserting that labour, far from being the source of all value, was simply a burden. Play and pleasure have to be restrained and subordinated to guilt in capitalist society in order to prevent any 'irrational' diversions from the centrality of productive labour. Hence, for Marcuse, play and sexuality have a revolutionary potential which has been seriously neglected by critical theory (Geoghegan, 1981). Marcuse adopted the basic framework of Freudian psychology to explain the processes of social control in capitalism where the superego controls libidinous drives under the watchful eyes of the state and the family. Capitalism, however, comes to depend on 'surplus repression' which goes far beyond what might be regarded as the necessary constraints on individuals as members of society as such (Marcuse, 1969). These moral and political restraints on human sexuality were being gradually undermined by economic changes in late capitalism – particularly automation – which made the traditional pattern of work and the family increasingly irrelevant to capitalist economic processes. Social freedom requires sexual freedom; both freedoms were being made possible by capitalist economic change. The main threat to these potentialities came from the commercialization and commodification of sex, which rendered sexuality profitable. In *Eros and Civilization* (1969), therefore, perverts replaced the proletariat as the principal agents of change within a capitalist society.

Marcuse's reinterpretation of Marx via Freud raises a problem which is central to all social theories grounded on an opposition between desire (as liberation) and reason (as restraint). There are two dimensions to this. The first was clearly expressed by MacIntyre: 'What will we actually *do* in this sexually liberated state?' (1970: 47). The second relates to this, namely that sexually liberated men may find their desires satisfied via dominance and pornography at the expense of women. The liberation of desire is implicitly the liberation of male desire which fails to provide any explanation of the location of women in a society where men through economic changes are either driven out of work by structural unemployment or liberated from work by automation.

The naive argument in favour of sexual liberation cannot adequately cope with the problem that sex can be a commodity – prostitution and pornography – that reinforces rather than questions prevailing social relations. Pornography is, however, paradoxical in providing both the illustration of the commercialization of sexual relationships and also the critical reflection of power and dominance in sexuality. The commodification of sex lends support to the argument that modern society is a pornographic society, 'a society so hypocritically and repressively constructed that it must inevitably produce an effusion of pornography as both its logical expression and its subversive, demotic antidote' (Carter, 1979: 86). What most liberationist accounts of sexuality, such as Marcuse's, fail to confront

is the problem of pornography as the expression of (male) desire over instrumental rationality. The fascination of de Sade and Sadism is that Sadism both expresses the inherent power conflict that trails alongside sexual freedom and by expressing power unmasks an over-romanticized view of male/female encounters:

An increase of pornography on the market, within the purchasing capacity of the man, and especially the beginning of a type of pornography modelled in that provided for the male consumer but directed at women, does not mean an increase in sexual licence, with the reappraisal of social mores such licence, if it is real, necessitates. ... When pornography abandons its quality of existential solitude and moves out of the kitsch area of timeless, placeless fantasy and into the real world, then it loses its function of safety value. It begins to comment on real relations in the real world. (Carter, 1979: 18–19)

The pornographic utopia then begins to act as the mirror-image critique of the 'natural' but exploitative relations between men and women within the domestic sphere of the home. Marcuse's approach to desire/reason with its emphasis on play as liberation fails to take adequate notice of pornography as a practice of power which, only under special circumstances, acts as a platform of criticism and change.

One interesting absence from the critique of instrumental reason and its subordination of desire in the tradition that links together Fourier and Marcuse, is the absence of children (Bell, 1980). This absence is one very strong indicator of the fact that the conventional or traditional debate about reason/desire is a debate among men which submerges or obliterates the connection between desire and reproduction. Children are almost entirely absent from the sexual utopias of men. The liberation from restraint often appears therefore as a one-sided male liberation from surplus restraint on the id. In writing the history of desire we would in fact have to write two histories, male desire versus female desire. Both Marxist and critical theory have been peculiarly blind to the social division of desire in terms of gender and patriarchy. This study of the sociology of the body hinges, as a result, on masculine control over female desires. The liberation of sexuality has to ground itself in an analysis of how desire versus reason has been institutionalized within a sexual division of labour which also involves a social division of emotions.

Foucault recognizes that, in the modern period, a sexual identity is imposed on us and this sexual identity has to be either male or female – an issue which he explores in the story of *Herculine Barbin* (1980b). Yet in his major work on sexuality there is no significant attention given to gender divisions and how cultural divisions are elaborated onto the physiological difference between men and women. For Foucault, sexuality is a unity which can have one history; we do not talk about the history of sexualities, because in Foucault's account the body is implicitly the unified datum upon which knowledge and power have their play. This assumption is widespread in the literature. In *Bodies in Revolt*, Thomas Hanna, for example, while recognizing the difference between male and female sexual roles, can still refer naively

to sexuality as 'a centrum for human experience' (1970: 287). Similarly, while Deleuze and Guattari (1977) have attempted to criticize the notion of desire as merely lack or absence, they also imply that desire (the id) is ultimately a unity.

### Capitalist Bodies

Our attitudes towards sexuality, women's social roles and gender are in part the arcane legacy of feudal Christianity and the requirements of property relations in modes of production based on private appropriation. Our attitudes have also been shaped by the ancient history of family life and patriarchal household. In late capitalism these attitudes in many ways no longer conform to the actual requirements of the economy or to the social structure of a capitalist society which is organized around corporate ownership. Because property and investment are now concentrated in corporate bodies, family capitalism no longer plays a major role in industrial economies. Capitalism no longer requires the unity of the family in order to guarantee the distribution of property. Although capitalism may still require the household as a unit of consumption, it is not a requirement of capitalism that these households should be of the nuclear variety. The ascetic mode of desire is thus not pertinent to contemporary forms of capital accumulation and largely inappropriate to individual consumption. The factory floor must have social regulations to ensure continuous and efficient production, but even in the case of productive arrangements it is perfectly possible to de-skill the labour force and replace it with the dead labour of machinery. Modern capitalism tends to foster hedonistic calculation and a narcissistic personality. Consumer culture requires not the suppression of desire, but its manufacture, extension and detail.

The theoretical and moral reaction to these new possibilities of mass pleasure has been varied and complex. One position is to see that new culture as essentially an ideological incorporation of the working class into capitalism; the new consumerism is simply the old 'bread and circus' approach to domination. Much recent analysis of consumption is in this respect largely negative (Baudrillard, 1975; Lefebvre, 1971; Marcuse, 1964); modern consumption is seen to produce a passive, subordinated population which is no longer able to realize its 'real' needs. Despite its critical tone, the analysis of consumerism often assumes a conservative stance. The argument that consumerism encourages narcissism can implicitly embrace a nostalgic adherence to the family, the work ethic and patriarchal authority (Barrett and McIntosh, 1982). The critique of modern leisure and consumption can also be puritanical, neglecting the element of personal freedom which some modern technology makes possible (Kellner, 1983). The critique of consumerism is thus a version of the dominant ideology thesis (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 1980) in which consumers are uniformly incorporated by all commodities. It is simply not the case that consumers inevitably

absorb the meaning and purpose of mass advertisements (Ewen and Ewen, 1982).

There is, of course, another version of the incorporation argument. The hegemonic control of capitalism over desires and needs is exhibited in the situation that capitalism can survive and tolerate individual deviance and social pluralism; the tolerance of capitalism is oppressive. However, if capitalism can survive successfully in a context of widespread sexual permissiveness and personal freedom in the marketplace of commodities, then it is reasonable to conclude that capitalism does not require massive ideological supports. It operates through political, economic and legal regulation of the population. The paradox of the hegemonic argument is that capitalism enjoys the hegemony of permissiveness which it does not actually require. In my view, the argument can be expressed in a more cogent sociological form: capitalism no longer requires hegemony in sexual and personal domains, and this is precisely why cultural pluralism is characteristic of late capitalist societies. What capitalism does achieve is the commodification of fantasies and pleasures. There has been a rationalization of desire through the supermarket, advertising magazines, credit facilities and mass consumption. Although the critique of consumerism correctly points out that many aspirations in the population cannot be adequately satisfied by consumer society, because, for example, the unemployed do not possess purchasing power, it is also the case that the content and nature of advertising are shaped and determined by consumer needs. With changes in the nature of employment and the household, the focus of advertising has shifted from the young to the middle aged. The relationship between needs and consumption is far more complex than the hegemonic argument suggests.

The critique of capitalist consumerism has eventually to rest on some notion of real needs and on some distinction between need and pleasure. Desires are 'vain', but needs are 'real'; capitalism operates at the level of trivial pleasures, but it cannot, according to the consumer critique, ultimately satisfy our needs. Behind this argument there is another assumption: exchange-value is bad, use-value is good (Kellner, 1983). By virtue of our embodiment, we have real and mundane needs which must be satisfied and these needs are universal, which in some respects defines what it is to be a member of the human species. There are various problems with this position which are explored throughout this study. There is, however, one point which we can note immediately about the argument from universal needs. What we can say about these needs is generally vague and trivial. Human beings need to eat, but what, when and how they eat is entirely variable. Individual variations in sleep patterns, sexual activity and eating habits appear to be unlimited. Even our individual anatomy is variable (Williams, 1963). The problem is that we live in a socially constructed reality and our pleasures are acquired in a social context, but this is also true of 'need'. To some extent the contrast between 'need' and 'desire' is grounded in a distinction between 'nature' and 'culture'. Our needs are seen to be real,

because they are natural and they are natural because our bodies are a feature of the natural landscape of our existence. By contrast, desires are vain because they are cultivated. Our culture emerges from the cultivation of our bodies and the more civilized we become, the more unnecessary our cultural baggage appears to be. While desire is mere luxury, needs are necessities. This distinction is difficult to maintain, because what we perceive as needs are in fact thoroughly penetrated and constituted by culture. The distinction between need and desire is primarily a value judgement. In the mediaeval period, theologians condemned husbands who found pleasure in the bodies of their wives; in the twentieth century, critics of consumerism condemn the middle class who find pleasure in vain commodities. Both critiques make a value judgement based on a distinction between necessities and luxuries. What we regard as a need is very much bound up with expectations about what is normal, and what is normal is not simply a statistical criterion because what is normal is essentially cultural. The oddity is that in everyday language we often use 'normal' interchangeably with 'natural' and thus what conforms to nature is what conforms to social expectation. However, since with technological and social changes, modern societies are less exposed to, and dependent on, 'nature', nature as a criterion for social arrangements becomes increasingly irrelevant. Social change rolls back the barrier of natural necessities.

The ontological status of 'nature' is of particular importance in the debate about gender relations. There is general agreement in sociology that notions like 'maternal instinct' and 'maternal deprivation' are aspects of an ideology which induces women to stay at home as mothers. The conventional view of women as mothers confuses 'mothering' with 'parenting'. More generally, while there are biological differences between men and women, these are culturally mediated and historical. What we regard as male and female characteristics are socially constructed differences and these characteristics can be radically changed by social and political intervention. The logic of this argument would, however, also include the notion that biology is itself socially mediated and that biology is a classificatory system by which experiences are organized. What stands behind 'gender' is not an unmediated reality but another level of social constructs and classifications; the anatomy of the body is precisely such a classification (Armstrong, 1983). 'Gender' is a social construct which mediates another social construct of 'biology'. There are no natural criteria for judging what is valuable or real and to admit that there are biological differences between men and women may be perfectly admissible, but it necessarily means the adoption of a perspective. Biology is cognitive systematization (Rescher, 1979). Biological facts exist but they exist by virtue of classificatory practices which preclude fixed points (such as 'nature') precisely because we inhabit a world that is perspectival.

Concepts like 'desire', 'need' and 'appetite' are part of a discourse by which we describe rather than explain. From a structuralist perspective, 'biologism' is one type of discourse; 'feminism' is another. Structuralism

regards these discourses as autonomous since 'texts' have a life of their own. Although structuralism represents a particularly powerful position, the argument of this study is that the discourse of desire, and more generally the location of the body, has to be understood in terms of massive changes in the whole structure of societies. The debate about the nature of women in modern societies is an effect of the changes in the social position of women and the transformation of the social role of women is an effect of the reorganization of capitalism. Whereas the economic process of feudalism required the detailed control of female sexuality within the landowning class, the organization of property in late capitalism does not require a regimen of sexual control. Capitalism no longer depends on the existence of the nuclear family and the structure of the household has changed fundamentally in the post-war period. The traditional notion that women were desirable but not desiring has collapsed along with the Victorian family and the double standard. It is not inconceivable that capitalism will cease to be a society in which there are definite sexes; genetic engineering certainly makes this outcome technically possible. What contemporary capitalism does require is the security of production, a technology of consumption and the commercial legitimation of desire. The differentiation of bodies by sex is increasingly irrelevant to these three conditions.