

Love & Eroticism



Edited by
Mike Featherstone

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Love and Eroticism

An Introduction

Mike Featherstone

ACCORDING TO OCTAVIO PAZ (1996: 7), when we speak of love and eroticism we cannot but be aware of their association with the absent third term, sexuality. Paz, the Mexican poet and Nobel Prize winner, argues that sexuality is clearly the primordial source with eroticism and love the derivative forms. The need to reproduce sexually is something we share with other animal species, along with most plant species as well. Yet, as Paz reminds us, animals always copulate in the same way, whereas human beings have woven around this act a wide range of practices, institutions, rites and representations. Eroticism is this infinite variety of forms based upon constant invention, elaboration, taming and regulation of the sexual impulse. Sexuality, then, makes eroticism possible, but eroticism transcends reproduction through its capacity to elaborate sexual experience and invent a separate realm of associated pleasures. Or, as Zygmunt Bauman succinctly puts it in his contribution to the volume, eroticism is the 'cultural processing' of sex.

While erotic attraction to another person is universal and appears in all societies, love on the other hand is usually seen as culturally and historically specific. Of course, as Paz (1996: 26) reminds us, the 'amatory feeling', the mysterious and passionate attraction towards a particular person, is something which is more exceptional, but nevertheless it too can be found in all societies and historical periods. This amatory feeling, according to Paz, requires two contradictory conditions: in the first place, the mysterious attraction that the lovers experience is perceived as an involuntary force that can overcome the reason and will; yet, on the other hand, the other person must be freely chosen and must themselves be in a position to decide otherwise. While this amatory sentiment is the rudimentary form of love, love itself goes further: as Paz (1996: 26) puts it, 'love goes

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beyond the desired body and seeks the soul in the body and the body in the soul. The whole person.' This is a point emphasized by Maria Esther Maciel in her contribution, which focuses on Paz's book *The Double Flame: Essays on Love and Eroticism* (1996).

This movement from the amatory sentiment to love itself, in which the beloved becomes seen as the necessary missing part essential to complete one's being and the pursuit of the relationship becomes an overwhelming life project, is enhanced with the development of a philosophy of love. The latter arises only with the presence of a particular set of social, intellectual and moral circumstances. Sometimes the idea of love can become a powerful ideology which dominates a society. Then, as Paz (1996: 28) reminds us 'we find ourselves in the presence of a way of life, an art of living and dying, an ethic, an aesthetic, and an etiquette. A *courtesy*, to use the medieval term.' Important here are the ways in which a culture of love emerged within court societies and became a privileged body of knowledge and practice of a small group of men and women. Yet we should be aware that this form of courtly love emerged not only in Europe but in the Islamic world, India and East Asia too. The Chinese novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Ts'ao Hsúeh-ch'ín and the Japanese novel *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikubu both describe love affairs in the courtly aristocratic world (Paz, 1996: 29ff). Both books point to the close relationship between a high courtly culture and a philosophy of love – something which is absent from many accounts of the history of love.¹

There are two aspects of the court society which are particularly relevant to the emergence of love as a way of life and as a powerful cultural image: the role of cultural specialists who made and circulated representations of love and the growth of the power of women. Love, then, should not just be seen as a practice, a physical relationship between two people, the history of love is also the history of a literary genre. The literature on love generally developed in close interplay with the philosophy of each era. As Paz (1996: 126) reminds us, all the great changes in love correspond to shifts in literary movements, which both reflected on the different forms love could take and converted them into high ideals.

The growth of romantic love in 12th-century France was, therefore, made possible through the development of Provençal poetry which offered an image and ideal of courtly love worthy of imitation. Hence the Provençal poets were responsible for the formation of the Western code of love: they invented love as a way of life alongside the invention of lyric poetry. Important here was the transition from chivalrous poetry written by noblemen for aristocratic women of their own strata to romantic lyric poetry written and performed by non-aristocratic professional poets who wandered from castle to castle. The poetry was not constructed to be read, but to be heard, with poems accompanied by music performed in the castle of the great lord. The subject of the poems was generally love between a man and a woman, and the poems were spoken in the vernacular form and not Latin, so that the ladies of the court could understand. The relative shift in the

balance of power between the sexes among the aristocracy which permitted women to have greater freedom was hence accompanied by the emergence of a group of troubadours who were wandering poets, who furthered the shift by presenting the man as the slave of his lady in their poems.² The poets were almost always inferior in social rank to the ladies and love was frequently presented as a mysterious exaltation, both physical and spiritual, a state of bliss derived from purified desire. The longing for the lady was all the more poignant given the social differential and physical separation from the beloved which was both experienced and also something that could only begin to be adequately expressed in poetry.³ For Paz (1996: 64) the emergence of love is inseparable from the rise in status of woman; as he remarks 'There is no love without feminine freedom.' Love, then, depends upon the capacity of the woman not only to attract, but to choose and reject, to become seen as a person in her own right, albeit that this ideal, along with that of courtesy, was limited to the upper strata. In terms of the predominant form of arranged marriages, love relationships were daring and dangerous transgressions.

The movement towards the fully developed court society, such as the Versailles of Louis XIV described by Norbert Elias (1983), in the 'gilded cage' of court life with its elaborate ceremonies and rituals, cultivation of formal conversation and good manners, provided a closed world replete with artifice, spying and intense rivalries in which the yearning for romantic relationships with social inferiors became a strong counter-ideal. As Elias (1983: 214ff; see also Featherstone, 1995: 26) reminds us, the sociogenesis of the romantic sentiment can be found not only in the middle classes, but in the court society, where aristocrats who were subjected to the incessant self-control and calculation of court life developed a nostalgia for the simpler life, not only manifest in a longing for country life, but in a longing for the more expressive and spontaneous relationships of romantic love with trusted social inferiors. A literature developed around these romantic themes. In the subsequent years, love relationships and the trials and sufferings of those involved in them became subjected to an endless elaborate set of representations not only in literature and the arts, but increasingly in Western popular cultural forms too.

At the same time, in the Western tradition, there is a good deal of attention paid to the dangers of love, to the irrationality of attraction, to the impossibility of sustaining love and the eventual price to be paid in the disruption of social relationships. In her article in this collection, Mary Evans argues that while there has been a fascination with romantic love in the West, love has generally had a bad press from novelists, with women being as critical as men. Jane Austen, for example, is seen as the most profound and articulate critic of romantic love. She was strongly opposed to the 'young, heated fancy', the expectation of love and romance which people assumed was necessary for marriage. Austen is for detached reason and judgement against the cultivation of passionate feelings. Romantic love is seen as trapping women in false expectations and crippling demands. The

subsequent history of love in post-Enlightenment Europe, Evans tells us, has been a contested one. On the one hand, love has often been regarded as lower class and irrational, with men and the socially powerful perceiving love as feminizing. On the other hand, for women and the less powerful the project to achieve the recognition of love has been linked to the project of the domestication of men and the achievement of female autonomy and citizenship. The paradox is that love has at the same time been a weapon of the powerless and a vehicle of oppression.

For women, romantic attraction has meant that they have increased their capacity to exercise choice. It has also been a way to undermine the emotional stability of men. Nevertheless, Evans reminds us that the ardour of the pursuit increases the aggression and violence between the sexes. Cultures like ours which condone romance are also beset with the consequences of the misreadings of romantic intentions. The problem is that by falling in love we expect that the other person will make good the intimacies experienced in childhood which were lost in adult life. In the end Evans's verdict is a sober one: 'Far from giving individuals a guide to the expression and articulation of emotional feelings, romance distorts and limits the possibilities of human relationships.'

A more sanguine view of this process is provided by Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim in her contribution entitled 'On the Way to a Post-Familial Family'. She sees the history of the family as involving a process of individualization. This entails women progressively moving out of the dependence of the private sphere (in what is referred to as the 'halved modernity' of the 19th century, which still contains some survivals of feudal institutions [see Beck, 1993; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995]) to a situation of greater state support against the market in the second half of the 20th century which has increased the scope for individual action, particularly for women ('reflexive modernity'). In this second phase women are able to see themselves more as individuals and enjoy greater autonomy and the capacity to construct their own life projects ('do-it-yourself biographies'). This of course also opens up a vast market for advice books, magazines, counselling and therapy on how to build, undo and reconstruct relationships, bodies, selves and sex lives (the consumer culture market is discussed later). The class dimensions of this process of individualization, and the potential reversals among specific groups (among the expanding underclass or in fundamentalist groups such as the Patriots, the 'Pure Love Movement' and the 'Born Again Virgins of America', in the USA [see the discussion in Cindy Patton's contribution]), also need inscribing into the same social space. Aspects which suggest a more complex set of social and cultural power struggles are at work and not just the logic of reflexive modernization.

The process of individualization has also been linked to the differentiation of the family by Georg Simmel in his essay 'On the Sociology of the Family', which appears for the first time in English translation in this collection. Simmel draws attention to the part played by love in this process.

Love is associated with the transition to individual choice of partners and hence an improvement in the status of women. As David Frisby reminds us in his Introduction to the translation, for Simmel love was something both within everyday experience, in the I–You relationship, yet it created a third entity, a phenomenon totally beyond it, something which was ‘more-than-life’. This double aspect of the process is also captured by Beck-Gernsheim. On the one hand she points to the increasing fragmentation and complexities of family life, in terms of the difficulties of coordinating the increasingly unstable and irregular tempos of family members, who have their own individual biographies to construct and priorities to negotiate, as they increasingly seek to live their own lives. Yet she also suggests that this increasing complexity does not diminish the quest for love and intimacy. Rather, individualization may drive men and women apart,⁴ but it also fosters a longing for the opposite, the world of intimacy, security and closeness, the ‘normal chaos’ of love (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 34ff; Sennett, 1998).

As Charles Lindholm mentions in his contribution, a number of sociologists such as Weber, Simmel, Parsons, Habermas and Luhmann have investigated the connection between romantic love and modernization. Yet this attention to modernity contains the danger that the pre-modern is confined to the homogeneous category of tradition, which continues to retain its Enlightenment resonance as a blame-word. Lindholm suggests that it is possible to find correspondences between Western romantic love in ‘simpler’ societies. Anthropologists, for example, suggest that the Ojibwa of the northern Great Lakes live in a society of extreme competitive individualism with mobility of residence and a lack of stable authority structures and social hierarchy. In this social climate of distrust romantic love is associated with marriage and the couple idealized as a refuge against a hostile world.

One of the most interesting sociological accounts of love is provided by Niklas Luhmann (1986), who suggests that amid the constant information flows and impersonality of the modern world, romantic love stands out as an important means of symbolic exchange (see Bertilsson, 1986). Luhmann argues that love gains significance in the transition from the feudal to the market society. In pre-modern societies love was restricted to certain groups and was highly delimited in terms of who could love whom, when and where (as, for example, in the case of court society). With the rise of industrial society passionate love became extended throughout the population. The literature on love of the 18th and 19th centuries (confessions, novels, pornography) became socially important by helping to provide ‘codes’ between men and women, especially in the increasingly urbanized world of strangers. In effect, the growing predominance of passionate love had the function of encouraging strangers to meet and converse. A parallel market to the economic market, the market of free emotions started to develop. A market which saw the new ideology of love increasingly extend its scope across the social space to undermine the ‘restrictive practices’ of class,

religion and ethnicity. The growing democratization of love in the 18th century also saw love as increasingly linked to sexuality and both becoming central to marriage.⁵

Yet if love and sexuality came together in the 18th century, a number of commentators see them as becoming increasingly separated in the late 20th century. Eva Illouz reminds us that the growing medical discourse in the 18th century began this process of disentanglement. Michel Foucault (1981) has, of course, discussed in detail the processes whereby medical and therapeutic discourses emerged to investigate and monitor the sexual body as part of an extension of 'bio-power'. Arguing for an increased separation of love and sex in the late 20th century, Illouz remarks that love at first sight is no longer credible as it is seen as merely a pretence for sexual desire. Increasingly, sex becomes a key component of intimacy, hence the romantic narrative of love has lost its cultural motivation. Love has become flattened out in the search for intensities of sensation and feelings. She argues that 'Postmodern romance has seen the collapse of overarching, life-long romantic narrative, which it has compressed into the briefer and repeatable form of the affair.'

In contrast to the single-minded *grand amour*, the affair legitimated sex for its own sake and fitted in well with the post-Second World War consumer culture with its quest for novelty and pleasurable experiences. Since the 1960s, Illouz alleges that there has also been a democratization of the affair with both sexes participating on a more equal basis. Affairs increasingly reflect the consumer culture balance between lifestyle choice and consumer rationality, the sort of calculating hedonism associated with the new middle class (see Featherstone, 1991). As Illouz puts it, 'Affairs characterize the romantic experience of those professional and new cultural intermediaries, located in large urban centres, who are most proficient at switching between sexual pleasure and forms of economic rationality.' According to Illouz, the model of romantic love as an intense and spontaneous feeling has lost its power as members of this group are able to switch skilfully between consumer hedonism, sexual experimentation and calculating rationality. The overexposure and disenchantment of romantic passion in the mass media and consumer culture, along with emotional and value pluralism and the therapeutic ethos, have generated a deep-seated suspicion of the possibility of lasting love (see Illouz, 1997). Illouz opens her piece with the remark of La Rochefoucauld that 'most people would not have fallen in love if they had not heard about it', only to conclude her article with the wry reverse comment that under the postmodern condition 'many people doubt they are in love, precisely because they have heard about it in excess'.

This theme is taken further in Cas Wouters's contribution, a detailed analysis of self-help manuals and women's magazines since the 1960s. He argues that in the past there was a lust-dominated sexuality for men and a romantic love or relationship-dominated sexuality for women. The balance between love and sex has shifted for women, especially since the 1960s, with notions of passivity replaced by a higher expectation of active sexual

pleasure. More specifically, Wouters sees a series of swings between phases of increasing equality between the sexes, such as the 1960s and 1970s, and phases of greater concern with intimacy and love, such as the 1980s and 1990s. He relates these swings to broader social changes. In the 1960s and 1970s entire groups were socially rising and there was strong pressure from below against old authoritarian relations. This phase is more egalitarian with individual desires and interests given more importance and legitimization. In the 1980s and 1990s there is increasing pressure from above and the project of collective emancipation recedes. This is a phase of accommodation and resignation with a greater longing for enduring intimacy. The balance of power between the sexes shifts with each phase. For example, in the first phase men will often use the 'gender strategy' of appealing to a woman's *old* identity underneath, whereas women will seek to appeal to a man's *new* identity. Hence, Wouters reminds us, sex and love no longer can be seen as given facts but as 'talents to be exploited'. A process which requires more skilful and flexible emotional management from both partners, as they attempt to balance the longing for more intimate romantic relationships with the longing for easier sexual relationships without lasting ties.

Zygmunt Bauman, in his contribution 'On the Postmodern Uses of Sex', draws attention to the way in which bodily pleasures have become central to contemporary consumer culture. For Bauman there has been a move away from a surveillance and disciplinary order where norms of health were imposed on populations, to the quest for sensation. Fitness, not health has become the object for bodies. Fitness, he tells us, has no upper limit, because it has to do with lived experience and sensations which can't be objectively measured or validated intersubjectively. The aim is to maximize bodily pleasures, yet the inability to establish norms and limits leads to greater anxieties. Bauman goes on to remark that today sexual delights are the most sought-after pleasurable sensations. A good contemporary example here would be the publicity surrounding the new drug for male impotence, Viagra, which is already the fastest-selling prescription drug in history since its launch in March 1998. The key point here is not that there are massive numbers of impotent men suddenly coming forward, rather Viagra is being marketed and publicized, despite medical establishment disclaimers, as an aphrodisiac to boost people's sex lives – predominantly aimed at men, but women as well.⁶ Hence, as Bauman remarks, 'postmodern sex is about orgasm', with the ultimate experience seen as still to come in the future, something achievable with the help of drugs, gadgets, training and counselling. Sex, then, is inevitably a source of anxiety because of the premonition of failure, given the limitations of the ageing body and the inevitability of death.

Bauman's focus is primarily on what has been referred to as the 'inner body', the consumer culture emphasis upon training and maintaining the body at peak fitness to enjoy the full range of sensations available. Yet as has been argued previously, within consumer culture the inner body should

be seen as conjoined to the outer body, appearance (Featherstone, 1982; Hepworth and Featherstone, 1982). The achievement of fitness then is not just to work on tuning the body as the vehicle for maximizing pleasurable sensations, but also to enhance physical appearance: to achieve a slimmer, firmer, healthier, more active, energetic and sexy-looking body. This has of course its own particular logic and reflexivity, as spelt out in consumer culture slogans such as 'if you look good you feel good – and vice versa'. In a world of strangers the look of the body becomes an important passport to participate in the symbolic exchange and market of free emotions which Luhmann (1986) speaks of in which public life is seen as both a sphere of communication and excitement. This participation may be purely on the level of sexual attraction and erotic desire, but it also contains the promise of something more: the passionate affair and even love.

'Love is born the moment one sees a beautiful person. Even though desire is universal and spurs everyone on, each desires something different.'⁷ So remarks Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* (quoted in Paz, 1996: 35). Yet Octavio Paz disputes whether Diotima was really speaking of love, for him she is talking about erotic attraction. For there to be love we need a philosophy of love with its emphasis upon fidelity in the love relationship. A fidelity conceives itself as a higher authority than mundane social bonds which can lead to adultery, suicide and death. This type of love, associated with the worship of women and celebrated in the stories of Tristan and Isolde, Lancelot and Guinevere, the love Dante feels for Beatrice described in *La Vita Nuova*, often has tragic consequences. It is an aspect of love which has been likened to a religious conversion, in which we are pulled out of the mundane everyday world into an enchanted life (see Alberoni, 1983) – something which has a clear physical aspect: the body alters its appearance and functioning and goes through a state of shock.

As Andrew Travers informs us in his contribution to this collection 'The Nazi Eye Code of Falling in Love', our cultural assumption is that a woman in love cannot help employing a particular eye code. It is assumed that if her love is pure and intense her eyes will shine as if she is lit up from within. Travers argues that the eye code of falling in love 'always' carries a Nazi virus . . . because as Tolstoy reveals, it involves the surrender of reason to a cruel mysticism'. He suggests a parallel between Anna Karenin/Vronsky and Hitler/Goebbels. In the same way that Goebbels was immediately converted through experiencing the presence of Hitler while gazing at the Führer when he was speaking at a rally, so the eyes of a woman in love affect her lover.⁸ Yet the price of such powerful emotional experiences is that they end in tragedy, as was the case with Anna Karenin. Tolstoy increasingly distanced himself from this form of embodied passionate love in favour of a more sober religious love, to the extent that towards the end of his life in his short story 'The Kreutzer Sonata', he denounced all passion as a terrible evil. Travers also argues that we often fail to appreciate the complexity of the eye code: in this context he is critical of notions such as the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975), for its lack of sensitivity to the range of gazes

employed by both men and women (see also Gamman and Marshment, 1988). This point is also made by Mike Hepworth in his contribution 'Love, Gender and Morality', in which he discusses Stephen Kern's book *The Eyes of Love* (1996). While some influential feminists, art historians and critics have focused attention on the woman as an object of the male gaze in Victorian paintings, following Kern he argues that although the male gaze in paintings is more erotically direct, the female gaze expresses a greater tension between sexual desire and love, with the latter seen as the longing for a reciprocal, enduring and moral union of two persons. The female gaze is less subservient to the male expression of sexual desire, or lust, than is often suggested in art history, reflecting a more mature knowledge of worldly reality along with the tension between hope and experience.

In his contribution 'On the Elementary Forms of the Socioerotic Life', Sasha Weitman argues that there is a distinctive socioerotic realm, which provides a range of opportunities to get away from everyday life. Erotic reality is seen as set off in time (evenings, nights, weekends, vacations) and space (home, bedrooms, hotel, beach, car) from everyday life. It is a sphere in which the body is central, in which partners seek to reduce themselves to their bodies, to enjoy pleasure and sensation; in disrobing they effectively discard their social roles. Weitman argues that:

there exists a distinctive realm in interpersonal affairs, the socioerotic, that this realm entails a variety of rituals, occasions and relations, ranging from perfunctory social contacts (greetings, openings and closings) at one end, to elaborate social ceremonials and erotic sexuality at the other; that this realm is governed by its own distinctive logic, formulable in terms of laws and rules, that these generate and sustain distinctive practices (socioerotic rites) and experiences (socioerotic emotions) all of which involve the body, revolve around the experience of pleasures and consist of various and sundry rites of inclusion; finally, that it is these practices and attendant experiences that constitute the social bonds that tie people to one another. . . .

Weitman sees the socioerotic realm as indispensable for social life, as it provides modes of social inclusion, the rites and rituals which provide solidarity and closeness which bind people together. Echoing Durkheim, Weitman emphasizes the emotional excitement and bonding that can be generated when people come together in close embodied proximity. A form of bonding which generates its own set of rites and rituals, a scaled-down version of the sacred, which acts as a 'battery' to be charged up and sustains people when they return to the routine colourless world of everyday life (see Featherstone, 1991: ch. 8).

Important in Weitman's analysis is the fact that he draws attention to the spatial and temporal parameters of the erotic realm. On one level it is useful to distinguish the socioerotic realm from the wider field of everyday life. Yet it is also important to see this as a process involving different moments and phases. Initially there is a process of differentiation, in which

the erotic realm becomes separated and the subject of elaboration, codification and intellectualization. Later stages of the process contain the possibility of de-differentiation, or merging back together of the erotic and everyday life. Yet as we shall see, if we refer to the process of the eroticization of everyday life as a parallel process to the aestheticization of everyday life, then we need to account for not just the long-term historical temporality, but the specific spaces (e.g. the city) and times (e.g. 'free time') where these processes take place. We also need to be aware, following Georg Simmel (1997), of the capacity of erotic interludes, such as the affair, to take on a peculiarly aestheticized form and temporality. The love affair can, under certain conditions, like the adventure, not only fall out of the usual continuity of everyday life, but also attain a vividness and sense of narrative continuity and aesthetic unity that make a piece of life seem like a dream or a work of art.⁹ Indeed it is also possible for some individuals to seek to live their lives as an erotic adventure, to the extent that the swings between erotic immersion and dream-like involvement and instantiation seem to dominate the whole of life, and are not seen as merely an episodic break from it. In this sense the erotic can aspire to be a form of inner-worldly salvation and a life-order (see Featherstone, 1995: 59ff).

In his famous '*Zwischenbetrachtung*' essay Max Weber (1948) refers to the differentiation of the cultural sphere into separate aesthetic, intellectual and erotic life-orders. For Weber, the aesthetic, intellectual and erotic spheres were unable to repair the loss of ethical totality and capacity to provide a meaningful ordered life, as was the case with Protestantism (see Featherstone, 1995: 38ff). His negative view of aesthetics and erotics was based upon the assumption that the preoccupation with forms and immersion is the irrational force of sexual life, 'the only and the ineradicable link to animality' (Weber, 1948: 347), deflected attention away from the ethic of brotherliness. This concomitantly reduced ethics to aesthetics, with the consistency of conduct central to ethics becoming merely a matter of transitory taste and style, or the quest for sensation. Yet Weber was to alter his opinion about the erotic sphere later in his life through his involvement with Else Jaffe and Otto Gross. Else and Otto began a passionate love affair in 1907 and we have the first translations of some of their love letters in this collection. The letters are introduced by Sam Whimster, who draws a contrast between Max Weber and Otto Gross. Else wanted to bring the two men together, but they were diametrically opposed in temperament, lifestyle and intellectual beliefs (see Whimster, 1989; Green, 1976). Weber was distrustful of the blend of psychoanalysis, *Lebensphilosophie* and bohemianism which Gross advocated and saw it as a threat to science and civilization, which necessarily depended upon sublimation. Weber made visits in 1913 and 1914 to the countercultural communes that Gross and his followers had set up in Ascona in Switzerland, but although he was to admit that eroticism could represent a valid alternative to both ethical values and routinized everyday life in its capacity to offer an inner-worldly form of salvation, in terms of his own life-practice he maintained a restrained detachment.

Otto Gross, as Elizabeth Wilson argues, can be located within a bohemian tradition of love and eroticism. Certainly his advocacy and practice of an erotic and anarchistic lifestyle made Gross a precursor of Wilhelm Reich, R.D. Laing and others who were to be taken up by the 1960s counterculture. Elizabeth Wilson charts the history of Bohemian ideologies of love which can be traced back to the French literary culture of the 1830s. Here we think of the novels of Gautier and Balzac and the poetry of Baudelaire which explored love and death in relation to marginality, transgression and homosexuality. The Bohemia that grew up in Paris had a characteristic flouting of conventional bourgeois morality, taste and sexual mores. Baudelaire saw a new more virile type of womanhood as emerging in the city: lesbians, woman labourers and prostitutes. The *flâneur* can be seen as a feminine form of impotent wandering, a form of perpetual deferral rather than mastery which was part of a process of feminizing men. In the second half of the 19th century we find a more commercialized image of the Bohemian as some of the characteristic inversions of Bohemia became transformed into operas: Puccini's *La Bohème* and Bizet's *Carmen* being the most notable examples.

The figure of Carmen, as Pels and Crebas (1991) suggest, is particularly interesting in the way she is often presented as a transgressive *femme fatale*, someone who seems to both confirm the romantic myth and deny it. Bizet's opera was taken from Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen*, published in 1845. Mérimée's *Carmen* shows strong similarities to a story he had published a year earlier, *Arsène Guillot*, about a young Parisienne cocotte who is maintained by her lovers, which reveals Mérimée's sympathies for the Bohemian way of life. The novel *Carmen* is set in the exotic world of gypsies in Spain, yet there is a strong connection in the common usage of the term Bohemian to mean gypsy, vagabond, wanderer: hence its association with the marginal urban subcultural figures. The Bohemians were seen to resemble gypsies in a number of characteristics: their preference for the open spaces of the city to the home; their wandering from lodging to lodging to escape debts; their preference for casual lovers and relationships (Pels and Crebas, 1991: 356). Indeed, in many ways the figure of Carmen represents a projection of Bohemian free love and individualistic values combined with an idealized romantic version of gypsy life. What is interesting about the figure of Carmen is the way in which it has subsequently become a powerful cultural image and modern myth. Within consumer culture Carmen-inspired fashions reappear periodically along with the Carmen-look on covers of women's magazines. The Carmen image challenged the possessiveness and passivity associated with more traditional feminine ideals of love; instead, Carmen stands for a more active and individualistic ideal of non-exclusive love.

The Bohemian tradition, once transgressive and scandalous, with the value it placed upon romantic passion as the key to relations between the sexes, as Elizabeth Wilson reminds us, has been adopted more widely throughout Western society. This process goes back a long way and was

apparent, for example, in the commercialization of Greenwich Village which was taking place by the end of the First World War. This is also a central theme of Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976). The decline of Bohemia has been associated with the take-up and diffusion within consumer culture of many of its central assumptions such as transgression, excess, the triumph of feeling and sensation. Sharon Zukin (1988) also argues that Bohemia and the artistic lifestyle have become saleable commodities. The new middle classes now seek to live and spend their leisure time amid the 'staged authenticity' and ambience of the aestheticized public and private spaces in 'heritage' Bohemias such as Greenwich Village.

Henning Bech in his contribution to this collection on 'Citysex' seeks to bring together two aspects of social and cultural life which are usually held apart. Sex is absent from most studies of urbanization and the city, and the city is absent from most studies of sexuality. Yet, he argues, the city is thoroughly sexualized and modern sexuality is essentially urban. For Bech, the modern city has been supplemented over the last 50 years by the telecity, the telemediated city, and modern sexuality must be understood in relation to this world of strangers we see when viewing television. The telecity feeds back into urban everyday life to heighten the mixture of fantasy and reality, the anticipation of the seemingly ever present possibility of chance sexual encounters, generated perhaps by the glance of someone in the crowd, or the glimpse of a face on an advertising poster. This is a long way from the purposive rational activity of someone actively pursuing a specifically sexual goal, rather it works within a world of civil inattentiveness, and swings between routine bored surveillance and momentary flashes of deeper involvement.

Bech's argument here recalls the world of the *flâneur* in mid-19th-century Paris described by Walter Benjamin (1973). The distracted stroller passing through the urban spaces is subjected to a constant flow of new sensations and half-formed experiences, coupled with the momentary jolt from a face in the crowd, perhaps the experience of 'love at last sight' Baudelaire spoke of. This is the city which has been aestheticized through the ornamented surfaces of the urban fabric: the buildings, the street lamps, advertising hoardings, posters, handbills and countless other detritus of the urban consumer culture landscape. For Benjamin, they performed an allegorical function, summoning up half-remembered memories and associations, which flash into the mind only to be lost under the weight of the ever changing urban scene (Benjamin, 1973, 1982; Buck-Morss, 1989; Buci-Glucksmann, 1994; Featherstone, 1991: ch. 5). It is a world in which commodities and objects develop an anorganic sexual quality: they take their place in a landscape of fetishized and sexualized objects (van Reijen, 1988). Hence the excitement at the possibility of sexualized encounters Bech speaks of takes place against the backcloth of an urbanized sexual landscape in which many of the objects in the city fabric are already sexualized, already doubly-seen.¹⁰