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D. Michael Stoddart
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The scented ape

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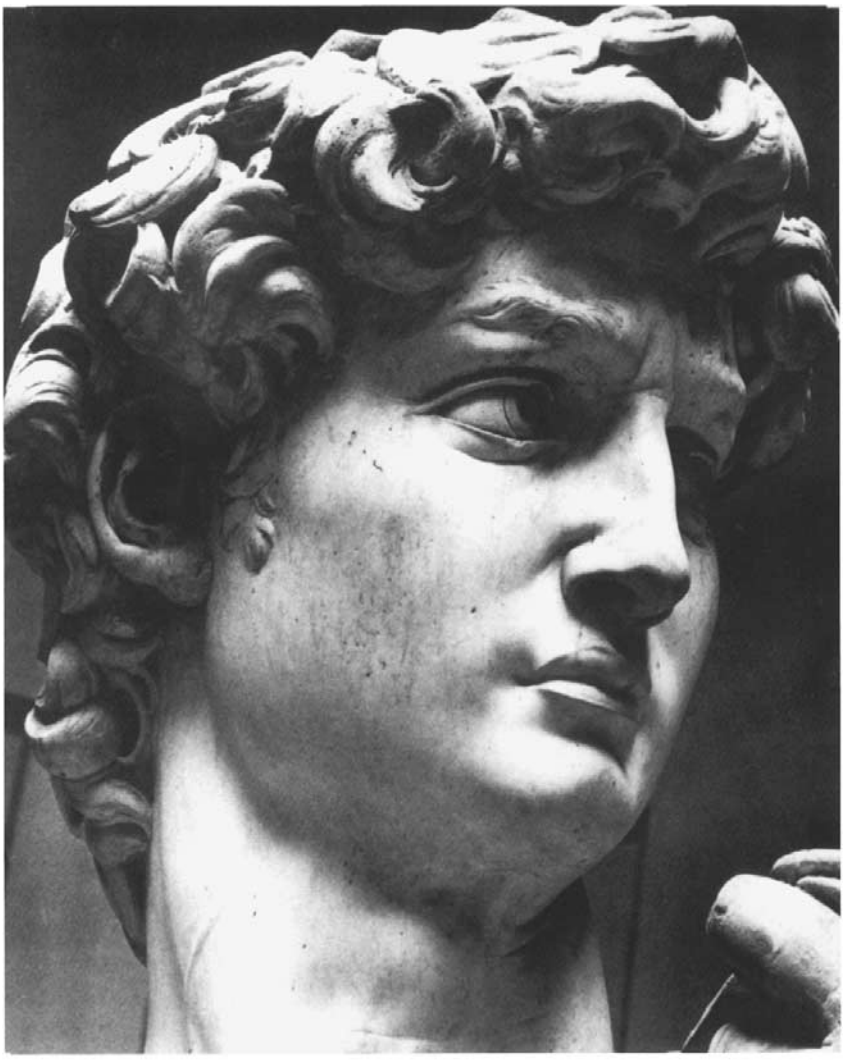

'Man is compos'd here
of a two-fold part;
The first of Nature, and
the next of Art.'
('Upon Man', Robert Herrick, 1591–1674)
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The biology and culture of human odour

D. Michael Stoddart
Department of Zoology
University of Tasmania

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Preface

This book started out as a review of what was known about the biology of human olfaction but very quickly I realised that since the subject deals with our own view of the odorous world, and our own contribution to it, and that our reactions to it were overwhelmingly emotional, it was impossible for me not to straddle the divide between biological fact and subjective human experience. After a short struggle I gave in gracefully and gratefully and have not hesitated subsequently to embrace what is critically recorded about human aesthetic and cultural perceptions of the scented world alongside facts and hypotheses supported by experimental investigation. I believe my work derives strength from my capitulation for without it the text would be devoid of those milestones of subjective experience which each one of us will recognise as we pass by, and which helps us to define the limits of our subject. I have written this book from a standpoint on the safe ground of comparative zoology, though I admit that my subject often beckons me towards the quicksands which so often characterise description of the human condition. We may not use our noses in social affairs, as do dogs or mice, but our heavily scented bodies constantly remind us of our links with the natural world. When all the trappings and affectations of civilisation are stripped away, we are merely scented apes. This uncomfortable fact leaves us feeling vulnerable and insecure, as if acceptance of it has revealed a window which gives onto a very private and tender part of our innermost beings. Through the window we can catch glimpses of the lives of our ancestors which remind us of the frailty of the veneer of humanness. I fear this book will not provide a light strong enough to illuminate *all* the details of what lurks behind the window, but I trust it is of sufficient intensity to allow us to make out the shapes of their blurred images.

My subject ranges from the scientific disciplines of comparative anatomy, physiology and reproductive endocrinology on the one

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hand to the humanistic ones of aesthetics, cultural anthropology and social history on the other. The inadequacy of my knowledge across all these fields will be plain to see; I hope experts in these areas will forgive me where I am lacking in their specialities but judge my work as a whole. In order to provide the reader unfamiliar with biological terminology and phenomena with a guide to help him through the more technical parts, I have written both a glossary of terms and summaries, in non-technical language, to chapters 2, 3 and 4. Readers aware of limitations in their biological knowledge are advised to read each summary prior to the chapter to which it pertains. Through these devices I hope no facet of my thesis will be inaccessible to any reader.

The first draft of the text was written whilst I was a Visiting Fellow at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, during Michaelmas Term 1988; the Master and Fellows made me very welcome and provided the ideal atmosphere for me to work in. Professor P. A. Jewell of the University's Physiological Laboratory kindly provided a departmental base for me and supported my work in many ways. Emeritus Professor Derek Freeman of the Australian National University and Dr Adrian Bradley generously gave of their time and expertise to read and criticise a draft of the whole text and to offer innumerable suggestions for its improvement. Dr Peter Davis kindly translated a number of short passages from Latin as well as providing the beautiful translations of the poems by Catullus. Other specialists have commented on parts of the text; I owe them all my most grateful thanks and appreciation but would point out that responsibility for the many remaining errors and omissions rests entirely with me.

According to the English librettist W. S. Gilbert 'Darwinian Man, though well-behaved, At best is only a monkey shaved'. Man is, of course, far more than that, and from my perspective as a zoologist interested in the power of the comparative method to point the way to the interpretation of human biology, he is a creature of kaleidoscopic interest. I find the interaction of biological and cultural variables to be a source of constant fascination and hope my attempts at analysis have contributed to anthropological understanding. The study of the biology of man is the greatest challenge open to the zoologist, and man as an animal is the most rewarding species for a zoological disquisition. I salute him.

D. Michael Stoddart
HOBART, AUSTRALIA

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