# Cosmopolitan Modernity

## Everyday Imaginaries and the Register of Difference

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MUCH OF the recent debate about cosmopolitanism has been concerned with questions of cosmopolitan democracy and global governance or with travel and migration. The historical trajectory of the cosmopolitan imagination and vernacular expressions in everyday local life and culture has, on the whole, been neglected. My project here will be to trace some of the complex historical detail and identify components of the contradictory dynamic which have contributed to the emergence of an uneven yet popular modern cosmopolitan consciousness. This will indicate how a more cultural studies and feminist approach can shift the parameters of the theoretical debate, not only about the cosmopolitan but also about the overlapping terrain of 'difference'. I will argue that the socio-political conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism need to be expanded in order to consider a wider range of practices, aspirations and identifications, among them, in particular, those associated with the specificity of gender. An exploration of these elements and their contribution to the historical formation of distinctive western cosmopolitan imaginaries enables us to make better sense of the past and can also enhance our understanding of the contemporary global conjuncture.

The geo-historical focus of my analysis is England, predominantly metropolitan London, in the first decades of the 20th century. The cultural mood I explore is associated with modernity. As a historical-conceptual framework, modernity has been notoriously contested, particularly in relation to its periodization and boundaries (see O'Shea, 1996, for a review of the debate). Nevertheless, despite the looseness of the term, some versions (e.g. Berman, 1983) provide a useful starting point for a study of

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the modern history of a cosmopolitan structure of feeling insofar as they emphasize the fluidity and excitement of modern urban life, physical mobility and encounters with strangers, transformations in culture and public space, and, above all, the advent of a new modern consciousness: a psychic, social and visceral readiness to engage with the new, with difference. This was the broad conceptual frame for my earlier work on the cultures of commerce and the associated expansion of the social, economic and imaginative horizons of women (Nava, 1996), which in turn alerted me to the significance of cosmopolitanism as one aspect of modernity. In this irregular configuration in English culture, transnational identifications and an interest in abroad and cultural difference – the allure of elsewhere and others – increasingly became part of the way of making sense of and embracing the modern world (Nava, 1998). Cosmopolitan modernity, as I have called this network of attitudes in order to emphasize its transactions with the popular urban worlds of commerce, entertainment and cultural production, was also a dialogic psychic formation which, I shall argue, developed in part out of a revolt against the conservatism and narrow national identifications of the parental culture. In this respect it was both of and against mainstream Englishness.

## Signs of the Cosmopolitan

Cosmopolitanism as an ideal to be aspired to surfaced unexpectedly for me in the process of trawling the archive of the London department store Selfridges for evidence of the culture of Empire in the years before the First World War.[1] The store was emblematic in a number of ways and its archive offers a useful insight into commercial culture of the period. Founded in 1909, Selfridges was considered a 'monument to modernity' and was one of the most frequented tourist venues in London. It was reputed to have attracted an astonishing one and a quarter million visitors in the week it opened.[2] A combination of theatrical emporium and leisure garden at which everybody was welcome, it was the brain child of the self-made American retailing entrepreneur Gordon Selfridge,[3] who was not only a commercial visionary and path-breaking publicist, but also a prolific writer and, less predictably, a supporter of women's suffrage, a promoter of equal opportunities for women shop workers, and most significantly in this context, an ardent cosmopolitan. So instead of uncovering the expected signs of patriotism and a reiteration of pride in Britain's imperial role in the world, what the archive investigation revealed were continuous eulogies in support of the cosmopolitan, of what Selfridge in his newspaper columns and advertising campaigns identified as a modern, inclusive, progressive world-view which quite deliberately challenged the traditional outlooks, insularity and exclusivity that he so disliked – and which, as an American magnate and public figure, he was so often forced to endure in London society of the time. 'The cosmopolite is a citizen of the world', he wrote 'free from national limitations and prejudices.'[4] His practical support of the cosmopolitan was expressed not only in the store's publicity – he advertised in 26 languages

and claimed his store was the most cosmopolitan commercial institution in the world at which all nationalities and races were welcome – but also in the more general culture and merchandise that it promoted.

It is possible to read Selfridge's cosmopolitanism as part of a globalizing commercial agenda. No doubt financial gains were made as a result. However, given the phenomenal business and social success of the store, his attitude should also be registered as an indication of a substantial strand of contemporary opinion. The appeal to cosmopolitan ideals will therefore inevitably have found resonance amongst his customers. The market is a much more sensitive indicator of popular mood in this respect than, for example, established literary texts, exhibitions, government records and school teaching materials, all used frequently by historians and cultural and political theorists. Commercial culture, precisely because of its responsiveness to the market, and to the preferences of women customers in particular, can yield information about processes and preferences not easily extracted from more conventional archival sources.

Selfridge's cosmopolitanism, moreover, needs to be seen as part of a wider structure of attitude, part of a more general embrace of the modern which placed it definitively at odds with more conservative regimes of belief of the time. Judith Walkowitz, in her recent work, confirms the association between cultural modernism and a new consciousness of London as an increasingly cosmopolitan centre during this period.[5] A good example of the dialogic reactive relationship between what was often a nationalist traditionalism at one pole and a more transnational modernizing impulse at the other, and which extended across a number of overlapping cultural spheres, was a public feud between Gordon Selfridge and G.K. Chesterton which lasted for over 15 years and reached one of its periodic eruptions in 1912. Chesterton was a well-known and prolific writer of journalism and fiction, a staunch inventor and defender of English patriotism and tradition (see Chesterton, 1987 [1904]), an opponent of votes for women, a noted anti-Semite (as a protagonist in the 1912 Marconi scandal) and a critic of cosmopolitanism (which for him was associated with Jewishness and decadence) – yet, despite all this, he also defined himself as a socialist, because he was militantly opposed to large-scale capitalist organizations and supported the small tradesman (Ward, 1944). Chesterton much disliked Selfridge's vulgar American style, giant commercial enterprise and cosmopolitan aspirations, and on this occasion published in his weekly *Daily News* column a coruscating attack on – as he put it – 'the unending hell' of the large department store and its mindless women shop workers, whom he described as automatons, 'like dress models without heads', who nevertheless, according to him, managed to emasculate their male colleagues (Chesterton, 1912). It is not irrelevant to draw attention to Chesterton's anxieties about the increasing power of women since they alert us to the coexistence of misogyny and xenophobia in this type of psychosocial viewpoint.[6] Chesterton's imagery, expressed at the highpoint of militant suffrage struggle, invokes a psychoanalytic reading of fetishism and fear of castration while also falling

squarely within the cultural convention of the period in which menacing machine-like qualities are projected onto women (Huyssen, 1986). Although Chesterton's article was not an explicit attack on Selfridge's store, there is no doubt from the ensuing correspondence that it was widely interpreted as such. Selfridge's response was to defend his staff vigorously. Two hundred of his women employees also wrote to the press protesting at Chesterton's insulting 'diatribe' and defending the progressive inclusive policies and conditions of their workplace (Women Workers at Selfridges, 1912).

Selfridge's support for the cosmopolitan – for a broader world view – was also apparent in the store's promotion of the modern and modernist cultures and products associated with foreign art and popular entertainment forms. Among the specific commercial developments of this kind was a new fashion in clothing and domestic décor which emerged in this same period before the First World War (Nava, 1998). Its relevance in this context is that it derived from a complex meshing – a condensation – of two distinct 'foreign' traditions, which blurred both in the public imagination and the commercial domain to form a generic popular cosmopolitan style. The new fashion was inspired both by the brilliantly coloured erotic oriental themes and imagery introduced to London by the avant-garde Russian Ballet in 1911, and the concurrent globally fashionable and more popular styles, colours and body postures of the tango with evocations of an exoticized Hispanic America. These styles of heterogeneous 'other' origin, which combined in the context of the department store, represented both a new kind of interest in abroad and also – significantly – a new, more sexually assertive, femininity.

Among the specific narratives alluded to by these fashions was *Schéhérazade,* the most successful and iconic of all the Russian Ballet repertoire, which, in addition to being visually and choreographically innovative and spectacular, was based on the controversial opening chapter of the *Arabian Nights.* This is the story of the Shah's wives, who, while the Shah and his courtiers are away on a hunting trip, order some of the male African slaves of the household to be smuggled into their compound disguised as dancing girls in order to seduce them. Rife with sexual anomalies, the ballet depicts the seduction – the day-long sexual 'clipping, coupling and carousing' as Richard Burton, the notorious 19th-century translator of the book, put it – and the massacre which occurs when the Shah and his hunters return unexpectedly. The slaves in this contradictory narrative are not only dressed as women; in the performances of this period they were also blacked-up. Leon Bakst's original designs codified the Persian women as white and their lovers as black.[7]

The tango was similarly controversial. Established as a flourishing cultural industry in pre-First World War Europe and America, with tango teas, tango exhibitions and tango academies as well as tango fashions – all promoted in the commercial sector – the dance was frequently taught by young male teachers from South America, the Caribbean and southern

Europe known as *tangueros*, (whence 'Latin lovers'). Rudolf Valentino was one of these before he became a movie star and danced the celebrated tango scene in *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.* So, like *Schéhérazade*, the tango offered a model of a more wayward femininity and likewise eroticized the 'other' male. The hybrid commercial style deriving from these two cultural forms, and repeated in the massively popular post-war genre of desert romance novels and films, like *The Sheik* (in which Valentino starred) evoked a narrative of otherness, a kind of 'elsewhere' of the imagination, which had a particularly libidinous investment for women and an appeal which appears to have transcended class barriers. Widely adopted, the new styles transformed the visual landscape of London. Shop windows across the city – not only Selfridges – blossomed in crimson, purple, jade and orange. More importantly, however, these foreign fashions transformed the intimate spheres of the body and penetrated the home. They were *incorporated* into the culture, they signalled fusion and identification.

Thus, although close in some respects to the regime of representations and attitudes identified as orientalism (Said, 1978) (and elaborated in a range of texts since then), the cosmopolitanism I describe must be distinguished from it, both because of the levels of intimacy and merger it involved and because of the way in which women were positioned. Unlike the exoticizing narratives identified by critics of orientalism – in which 'other' *women* are cast as objects of sexual desire and the oriental landscape is represented rhetorically as erotic female – in the cosmopolitanism of the commercial and entertainment spheres, women appropriate the narratives of difference for themselves in contrary and even polemical ways.

Among the women affected in this way were Violet Keppel and Vita Sackville-West, whose love affair at the time caused much scandal.[8] Violet redecorated her rooms to look like the set of *Schéhérazade*, and, after seeing the ballet twice in one week, Vita browned her face, put on men's clothes and a turban, and, with lighted cigarette in hand, walked with Violet down Piccadilly to Charing Cross from where they took a train to Orpington (Souhami, 1997). They were not alone in connecting fantasies of cultural difference to a new eroticism for women. Ellen Melville, the young idealistic Scottish feminist heroine of Rebecca West's novel *The Judge* (first published in 1922), believed, during those years, 'in absolute racial equality and sometimes intended to marry a Hindu as a propagandist measure' (West, 1980 [1922]: 30).[9] These statements must also be seen in the political context of the moment. The four years before the First World War saw the highpoint of early 20th-century feminist militancy in which the cultural aspirations of women from across the social spectrum underwent a change of seismic proportions.

This connection between a modern outlook, support for women's political and social freedoms and the idea of an abroad invested with a sexual allure, which represented at the same time a revolt against the perceived emotional constraints and social prejudices of conservative mainstream English culture, was an element in much of the literary work of this

period and flourished particularly in the interwar period. Biographical accounts of the 1920s and 1930s throw up numerous voices that echo the sentiments of Ellen Melville, often in a less frivolous way. Among them was Nancy Cunard, English poet, communist activist and passionately committed editor of the path-breaking 800-page anthology, *Negro* (1934) whose long-term partner was African American Henry Crowder. In a pamphlet entitled *Black Man and White Ladyship* (1968, first published in 1931), in which she launched a personal attack on her aristocratic mother for her racism and snobbery in attempting to exclude Crowder from England, Cunard argues that the black man should be valued for his *difference,* for his greater humanity and feeling, his musical genius, his artistic creativity and 'the best body amongst all the races' (1968 [1931]: 108).[10] These qualities are posed against the dreariness, decadence and social obtuseness of the white man, and the morally corrupt privileged and inauthentic world of her mother. A sense of the difference and humanity of foreign masculinities lies also at the heart of the literary output of E.M. Forster. Representations of the non-Englishman (for instance the Italian and the Indian) as more sensate, authentic and ultimately desirable, recur throughout his fiction and his essays.[11] In an enigmatic yet prescient few sentences at the end of *Howards End,* Forster, in 1910, comments on the link between imperialism and cosmopolitanism, on the way apparently polarized social forces influence each other. He wrote: 'The Imperialist is not what he thinks. He is a destroyer. He prepares the way for cosmopolitanism' (1979 [1910]: 315).

## Theorizing Cosmopolitanism

Controversies of this kind point to the existence of a distinctive albeit neglected and uneven cosmopolitan strand of political and cultural belief which existed in English society during the first decades of the 20th century, and extended across the spheres of commerce, popular entertainment, the arts and the emotions. In this structure of feeling, cultural difference and the foreign constituted a source of interest, pleasure and counter-identification that existed in tension with more conservative outlooks. Yet this way of thinking about cosmopolitanism has not figured in existing historical accounts of the period. Nor has it been taken on board in this way in the broad theoretical fields of postcolonial criticism, political philosophy or sociology, as I shall now argue.

Cultural historical work on England and Englishness of the last decades has been influenced by anti-racist and postcolonial perspectives and, for good political and intellectual reasons, has been concerned to reveal Britain's history of colonialism and empire abroad, and the associated legacy of nationalism and xenophobia at home. Research on the first half of the century has tended to focus on 'the invention of English tradition'; on England's cultural insularity and sense of global superiority; on the pervasiveness of racialized thinking; and on the particularities of England's conservative modernity (see e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Schwarz, 1987; Light, 1991; Young, 1995). Although Schwarz draws attention to the

paradoxes inherent within the new 'traditions' and Light's work makes central the contribution of women, these are exceptions. On the whole, historians have not been particularly concerned to explore the cultural opposition or disjunctures in England's imperial formations. An overlapping approach, broadly influenced by the work of Said on orientalism and cultural imperialism (Said, 1978, 1994; Torgovnick, 1990) has been to explore, critically, the discursive representations of elsewhere, the orient and the 'primitive' as an aspect of the continuing dominance of the metaphorical east and 'other' places by the west. Although immensely influential, the concept of orientalism has been subjected to criticism (see e.g. Young, 1990; Lowe, 1991) and is, in my view also, despite its evocativeness and apparent aptness, too monochromatic and monolithic to be able to take into account the contradictions in the historical popular mood described here (Nava, 1998). It tends to overlook the distinction between the colonizing and exoticizing imagination (Gilman, 1985). It also neglects the difference between the panoptic controlling gaze of, for instance, government and museums, and what Anne Friedberg has productively called the 'mobile' gaze of *flânerie*, spectatorship and consumption, which operates across the spheres of commerce and cinema and is most often exercised by women. Although both the panoptic and the mobile gaze are part of the scopic regimes of modernity, Friedberg argues that these visual practices are antithetical in power terms (1993). As a result of the dominant critical emphasis on international networks of power and exclusion, and the political imperative to uncover the *injuries* caused by differentiation, little attention has been paid either to the historical detail of the dissonant – albeit contradictory – patterns of resistance and desire (despite Bhabha, 1994) or to the particularity of the historical contexts from which these oppositional currents emerge. The cosmopolitan countercultures of modernity have been largely ignored.[12]

Political philosophers have been more interested in cosmopolitanism than cultural historians and a lively debate has been taking place over the last decade or so, in the context of the globalization process, which has taken as its starting point Kant's notion of a universal *polis* and has focused on the possibilities and problems associated with cosmopolitan structures of governance, issues of transnational citizenship and the environment (e.g. Held, 1995; Archibugi, 1998). These conceptual and policy questions have resurfaced over the latter part of the 20th century as the socio-political and philosophical limitations of the nation state and nationalism have become increasingly apparent. A good deal of the debate has been concerned to establish the way visions of cosmopolitan democracy are likely to perpetuate ideas of western liberal humanism or universalism, thereby denying or overriding the complex structures of local heritage and what are perceived as the more progressive values of nationhood (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1996; Nussbaum, 1996; Robbins, 1998). Critical views of cosmopolitanism within this disciplinary framework echo some of the ethical-political positions taken up by cultural historians in that they too aim to redress the balance of 'West' and 'other'. However, in relation to the popular

cosmopolitan aspirations and identifications among sectors of the English population during the first part of the 20th century, they offer little. Their principal contribution to this issue lies in the allusions to the symbolic meaning of the nation, the local and global, and therefore, by implication only, to the symbolic attraction of 'elsewhere'.

Then there is the notion of the cosmopolitan as a citizen of the world. This preoccupation, which straddles the domains of political philosophy, sociology and cultural studies, has opened up more fruitful avenues in relation to popular, personal and cultural levels. A good deal of the debate here has been influenced by the work of Ulf Hannerz, who has described cosmopolitanism as 'an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts' (1990: 239). The cosmopolitan in this framework (who by the way for Hannerz seems always to be a 'he') has reflexive cultural competencies appropriate to the contemporary world which enable him to manoeuvre within new meaning systems, while at the same time, however, remaining culturally and emotionally detached. Hannerz thus makes clear who is included in the category of cosmopolitan and who is not. Ordinary people – migrant workers, exiles from oppression and tourists for instance – do not necessarily possess the intellectual disposition (Robbins, 1998; Tomlinson, 1999). John Urry, in his C*onsuming Places* (1995), has drawn on the model developed by Hannerz to elaborate the idea of an aesthetic cosmopolitanism possessed by some contemporary travellers (who again we must assume are western though this is not discussed). He refers to the cognitive and semiotic skills, the linguistic and cultural openness and the willingness to take risks required in order to traverse and consume international landscapes and cultures. Although, like Hannerz, Urry can be accused of reinforcing a Eurocentric narrative of cosmopolitan privilege, the emphasis on the everyday, on a cultural disposition of openness and the visual, is useful. Nevertheless this model is ultimately too narrow for my purposes. Its concentration on the reflexive and the aesthetic ignores the unconscious non-intellectual *dialogic* relationship of the cosmopolitan to both the parental culture and abroad. It overlooks the dynamic interconnection between identification and distantiation – between desire and repudiation – which are complexly at play in the production of the cosmopolitan imagination as I perceive it, particularly during the period I've been looking at. It also fails to address issues raised by gender difference.

Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, in the context of a different debate, increasingly refer to the cosmopolitan nature of late modern diasporic cultures (e.g. Bhabha, 1996; Hall, 2001). In contrast to Hannerz, who sees cultures as easily differentiated entities through which the cosmopolitan negotiates a path, Hall and Bhabha use the concept to signal the blurred undifferentiated elements of contemporary British and global culture, the *post*-'multicultural' transformations which are contingent, temporary and hybrid, which suggest cultural mixing and indeterminacy rather than plurality and coexistence. Cosmopolitans in this model are migrants and

travellers from all over the world. (Paul Gilroy [2000] uses the designation to describe African American travellers in Europe between the wars, partly to make the deliberate link to Jews, as indeed they did themselves.) Within this broad theoretical framework, the richly textured notion of 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' is used to refer to the phenomenon of the global modern everyday, the routine barely documented cultural encounters of diasporic life. On the whole however, these authors have not spent much time excavating the origins of this vernacular cosmopolitan landscape and structure of feeling. Also, for good reason, they have not been concerned, on the whole, with the vernacular cosmopolitanism of the (white) English. Indeed, one of Stuart Hall's major contributions has been to elaborate the pervasive often coded ways in which racism works throughout the culture at the level of representation and fantasy (Hall, 1997). Hall, like Bhabha (1986, 1994), stresses the *ambivalence* in racialized regimes of representation and the frequent coexistence of fascination and repudiation in relation to the 'other'. This general approach is clearly pertinent for an understanding of the cosmopolitan mood I have described insofar as it illuminates the complex ways in which subterranean forces are at work in perceptions and emotions about difference. Yet the emphasis on the production of rac*ism*, however politically imperative, has led inevitably to the marginalization of the complex and changing nature of everyday cosmopolitanism and the socio-emotional aspects of *anti*-racism.

In fact none of the approaches I have referred to have been concerned to trace a history of popular English cosmopolitanism and transnational identifications over the course of the 20th century, or to explore the way in which certain key other places and peoples have at different moments and in different ways come to represent an 'elsewhere' of the imagination associated with pleasure, freedom and hope. The theoretical literature I've referred to is mainly schematic and paradigmatic. It is designed to open up debate and clarify issues but not to substantiate them with the fine detail, the often contradictory utopian and hedonistic particularities of visual and textual representations, of memory and fantasy, of origin and context. This lack of attention to specific experiences and narratives of cosmopolitanism has meant that certain qualities and shifts have been overlooked, among them, the location of women; historical variations in the calibration of difference; and the structure of the allure of difference. Interest in difference needs to be understood, as I have signalled already through the examples that I have presented, not only in relation to its historical context, but also as part of a more subtle emotional and unconscious register. So one element of my argument is that irrationality – the non-rational and affective aspect of our selves – is as important in establishing the dynamic of cosmopolitanism as Hannerz's (1990) reflexive and intellectual stance of openness.

Cosmopolitan aspirations can be rooted not only in a political and intellectual critique of nationalism but also in a sense of psychosocial dislocation and non-belonging. Gordon Selfridge, as already mentioned, was continuously marginalized by English elite society and, indeed, was refused

British nationality for 30 years despite his wealth and innovative contribution to British retailing (Honeycombe, 1984). Virginia Woolf speaks from another place, yet with a similar sensitivity to exclusion, when in her *Three Guineas* she identifies with the outsider: ‘As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world’ (2000 [1938]: 234). So what is also being posed here, in addition to not-belonging, is an imagined inclusivity which transcends the immediate symbolic family or nation. More recently, Stan Cohen (2001) has drawn attention to this larger appreciation of a common humanity in his speculations about why some individuals in Europe *did* help Jews escape from Nazis despite the extraordinary risk to themselves. Likewise, in the face of increasing anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria (and a fair amount in Britain), a number of 1930s intellectuals and left-wingers felt, as Labour MP Richard Crossman did, ‘ “pro-Jew emotionally”, as part of [their] anti-fascism’ (Kushner, 1989: 185) and of these, quite a few married Jewish refugees from Europe. Another example of this mood occurred later during the Second World War, when many thousands of white English women formed romantic relationships with black GIs, despite opposition from the USA army command and physical threats from white soldiers. It is clear from contemporary accounts that, for many of these women, a wider sense of inclusivity, both reflexive and emotional, was in part what impelled them and enabled them to confront the segregationist policies and practices of the US army, as well as quite widespread prejudice in England (though this was a good deal less than is often assumed) (Gardiner, 1992; Smith, 1987; Schwarz, 1996; Nava, 1999a).

Generational revolt and a social and political refusal to accept the conventions of the moment also played a part in the counterculture of cosmopolitanism during the period under examination. The idea of ‘abroad’ was indicative in this respect and had a powerful resonance (Fussell, 1980) (as indeed it continues to have today). Whether associated with Europe, India, Africa or America, it stood for a variable and mobile cluster of elements experienced as absent from the national culture: key among them sensuality, authenticity and opportunity. ‘Home’ in this imaginary landscape tended to be prosaic, class-bound, emotionally and sexually constraining. W.H. Auden, on his departure for Berlin as a young man in 1928, expressed it thus: ‘the real life wish is desire for separation from the family . . . [from] the immense bat shadow of one’s home . . . from all opinions and personal ties: from pity and shame’.[13] Virginia Woolf, according to her biographer Hermione Lee, married Leonard partly *because* of his ‘problematic Jewishness’. ‘This would have been the opposite of the sort of . . . marriage which . . . her parents could have countenanced’ (Lee, 1996: 308). So cosmopolitanism was also rooted in a psychic revolt against the parents and the parental culture – not only, therefore, in a sense of not-belonging, of no-home, no-country, but also in a desire to escape *from* family, home and country. Migrants and travellers have always moved from one place to another both because of the allure of somewhere else and because of the

insufficiencies and difficulties of their own cultures. So, in this respect as before, what is at issue is an impulse, an imperative, which lies partially beyond consciousness, and which, in its opposition to xenophobia and its desire for difference, may well be as profoundly and complexly fabricated as racism itself.

But what is interesting is that psychoanalysis, despite its concern with desire and the unconscious, has had relatively little to say about the attraction of sociocultural and racial difference or the complex process of identification with otherness and the socially ostracized. Its main practice in relation to race and difference has been to focus on racism and aggression. Thus Freud, in his *Civilization and Its Discontents,* originally published in 1930, uses the phrase the 'narcissism of minor differences' to describe the enduring hostility between ethnic and racial neighbours, predominantly men (1963 [1930]). More recent explanations tend to see racism as pathology rather than part of the natural order of things, as Freud implied. Although rooted in diverse approaches, these accounts are broadly united by the idea that 'others' are constructed unconsciously as 'bad objects' on whom whites or indigenous groups project negative shameful feelings about themselves (e.g. Gilman, 1985; Fanon, 1986 [1952]; Rustin, 1991). Few psychoanalytic accounts explore the unconscious dynamic involved in the *attraction* of difference. Clinically based studies which do touch on the matter can be broadly divided into those which see interest in others as symptomatic of unconscious conflict and those for whom such feelings are a sign of psychic health, fundamental to the constitution of the self. One argument is that sexual desire for difference – the construction of an ideal love object who is different and from somewhere else – arises in part from a prior anxiety about desire for the parent; it is the outcome therefore of the repression and displacement of incestuous desire. Conversely, a fascination with the new and different and a willingness to take risks are interpreted as part of growth and individuation. This seems to be the view of psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, who refers in one of his essays to the dull security of sameness: 'absolute sameness' he says 'unconsciously kills desire' (2000: 340).

Julia Kristeva uses psychoanalysis to address the socio-historical questions of nationalism and seems to concur with Phillips about the dull security of sameness. In her reading of nationalism, the 'nation' is rendered as a transitional object, as something to hang on to in the precarious process of separation from the mother(land). Attachment to the safety of the local, the known, is interpreted as a narcissistic impediment to mature transition. For Kristeva, the cosmopolitan imaginary of the late 20th century and 'living with foreigners' can lead to the recognition that we are *all* strangers, that the 'other' is within ourselves. In a heterogeneous 'paradoxical community' only strangeness is universal (Kristeva, 1993; Honig, 1998; Davey, 1999).

Jean Walton (1997) is among the few theorists who have addressed the question of racial difference and desire from a specifically gendered point of view. As part of a critical evaluation of classic psychoanalytic texts, Walton offers an innovative re-reading of the famous Joan Riviere essay on

womanliness as masquerade (written in 1929), in which Riviere's intellectual female patient, who assumes a mask of femininity and compulsively seeks the attention of men in order to avoid retribution, recounts childhood fantasies and dreams about a negro (Riviere, 1986 [1929]). Using a broadly Lacanian approach, Walton provides an insight into this neglected racial sub-theme in Riviere's essay which seems particularly pertinent for my discussion of cosmopolitanism. She suggests that:

> By shifting the emphasis from penis to phallus, we may be able to see how Riviere has possibly misread her patient's imagined attacker as a father figure; it may be more pertinent to see him as occupying a position similar to that of the woman, insofar as he, too, might have reason to engage in masquerade to ward off retaliation by those who fear he has usurped their position of privilege . . . [his] relation to the phallus, as signifier of white male privilege in a racialised patriarchal society, is as tenuous as her own. (Walton, 1997: 228–9)

Thus what Walton does is to offer a psychoanalytical reading rooted in a specific cultural history which enables us to distinguish white (or racially privileged) women's relationship to racial others from that of white men. White women, in this reading, particularly those who aspire to transgress the boundaries imposed by the conventions of cultural femininity, *identify* with black men, because, like themselves, black men are contingently denied power.

This reading adds to the sociological and historical observations made earlier about the particularity of gender difference in relation to cosmopolitanism. It suggests that the impulse towards cosmopolitanism is related to women's psychic as well as social formation. Kristeva seems to hint at something similar when she says that women are more likely to be 'boundary-subjects' than men, and therefore inclined to be either more nationalist or more 'world-oriented' (1993: 35), a view which echoes and complements Freud's thesis about men's greater predisposition to conflict with national and racial others.

The more psychoanalytically oriented explanations notwithstanding, a number of specific social and political conditions and features of early 20th-century femininity seem to have made women more inclined than men to be cosmopolitan in the cultural sense I have described. The earlier comments on Selfridges and the commercial and entertainment sector draw attention to the ways in which women contributed to the development of a popular cosmopolitan consciousness through their participation in consumer culture. In their capacity as shoppers, readers, theatre- and cinema-goers, they became instigators and mediators of narratives about the allure of difference and elsewhere. 'Other' fashions and cultural products bought by them increasingly transformed the female body, penetrated the intimacy of the home, seeped into the imagination. They pervaded urban culture.[14] These developments must be understood in the context of a heightened consciousness of women's political and social exclusion. The

suffrage movement and the idea of the new woman were dominant tropes throughout the period and were associated not only with a greater awareness among women of their own marginalization but also (linking back to Walton's point) with a more sensitized identification with others, and indeed with internationalism. Such identification with the socially excluded has a long, albeit contradictory, history. Women over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries were frequently active in the development of a more inclusive culture,[15] and the ambivalent relationship of some to patriotism, as evidenced in Virginia Woolf's statement, was often expressed during the interwar period in staunch support for international pacifism (Montefiore, 1999). Women's cosmopolitan imagination was also fuelled in part in reaction to English masculinity, particularly that of the middle and upper classes, which was constructed in literary and biographical accounts of the time, by men as well as women, as unemotional, uncommunicative and sometimes sexually inept.[16] And of course, the fact that there were simply fewer men to go round because of the demographic decimation of the First World War, provided added impetus to the tendency. It was in this context that women's fantasies of Arab and Latin lovers flourished, as demonstrated by hugely successful films like *The Sheik* and the associated genre of popular desert romance fiction oriented towards women during the 1920s (Melman, 1988; Nava, 1998).

The particularity of the gendered pattern of geo-historical migration to Britain during the 20th century will also have meant that women were more likely to form the first intimate social relations with people from elsewhere, with travellers, sailors, entertainers and migrants, who were all predominantly men. This occurred both in the case of the black GIs during the Second World War (Nava, 1999a) and subsequently after the war with the first wave of immigrants from the Commonwealth. A number of people, among them the West Indian author Ras Makonnen, have suggested that the half-conscious processes of identification and the juggling of social and sexual power in the encounters between white women and black men during the 1950s, the critical years of post-war settlement, constituted for women a kind of proto-feminism, while operating at the same time as a challenge by black men to racist forms of exclusion. As Makonnen put it, 'We recognised that the dedication of some of the [white] girls to our cause was an expression of equal rights for women. One way of rejecting the oppression of men was to associate with blacks' (quoted in Gilroy, 1987: 163; see also Selvon, 1979). White women's cosmopolitanism and their more generous relationship to the culturally repudiated 'other' during the earlier decades of the century can similarly be understood as a form of proto-feminism. Then, as in the 1950s, these acts constituted a revolt against the constraints of the dominant culture: against the past, against the conventions of femininity and family as well as Englishness and neighbourhood. Cosmopolitanism and feminism occupy a similar space in the discursive regime of the modern.

Ras Makonnen's voice suggests a more open, less pessimistic,

understanding of the complexity and delicacy of black man–white woman relationships than that expressed by Fanon about an analogous moment (Fanon, 1986 [1952]). It suggests (to go back again to Walton's point about the similarity of white women and black men *vis-à-vis* the phallus) that, what might be seen as the apparent feminization of the 'black' or 'other' man in the exchange with the white woman, should be understood as an outcome of the overlapping discourses of white and male superiority *in which they are similarly located.*[17] This degree of ambivalence, this tenuous masculinity, is not something that Fanon could entertain. As Bhabha points out, 'Fanon ignores the question of gender difference' (Bhabha, 1986: xxvi). Makonnen, in contradistinction, was able to identify and speak of a potential alliance – a mutual recognition – which, over the following decades, was indeed to emerge, particularly in urban Britain. The destabilization of patterns of national and racial difference, already under way at the beginning of the century, was consolidated, albeit unevenly, in the post-Second World War period of decolonization and was linked in complex ways to the synchronic destabilization of gender identifications.[18]

The outcome of this destabilization was the increasing *normalization* of difference, part of the spread of what Ulrich Beck (2002) has called the 'dialogic imagination'. This marks a major shift from the first part of the 20th century. The cosmopolitanism of modernity, as I have described it here, was not about the erosion or disavowal of difference. On the contrary: because it was formed in part as a counterpoint to the perceived conservatism of the dominant culture, in the crucible of imperial Britain, differentiation – the distinctions between the centre and the margins, between belonging and not-belonging, between Englishness and foreignness – was a core dynamic. Cosmopolitanism at that time was a flirtation with difference, with the outside, the elsewhere, the other. But, to paraphrase Kristeva, strangeness is universal now. Boundaries have been blurred. Miscegenation is ordinary.[19] Mongrelization is part of the new visual landscape of the cities. Although rooted in the cosmopolitanism that I have described – in earlier cultural imaginaries – difference in this new century is no longer very different.[20] In the large conglomerations it is part of mainstream English metropolitan culture: familiar, there on a daily basis, on the high street, on our menus, on the television, in the playground and the bedroom; a routinized part of cultural practice and social interaction: good and bad. This reconfigured permeable sense of national cultural identity and the *ordinariness* and *domestication* of difference are the distinguishing marks of vernacular cosmopolitanism in urban Britain today.[21]

*Notes*

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1. The Selfridge Archive, at the time housed in the basement of the store and now moved to the History of Advertising Trust in Norfolk, contained a substantial collection of uncatalogued sources which included store souvenir books and advertising

campaigns; copies of a daily 500-word syndicated column about issues of cultural interest inside and outside the store, often written by Gordon Selfridge himself, published between 1909 and 1939 in the London and national press and the *New York Herald Tribune*; and Selfridge's own 420-page book entitled *The Romance of Commerce* (1918), in which he spelled out his philosophy about retailing and life more generally.

2. This figure should be compared with the maximum figure of 30,000 achieved by the fated London Dome on a bank holiday weekend.

3. His is a rags-to-riches story. He left school at 10 and worked his way from stock boy to junior partner of Marshall Fields in Chicago, the largest and most magnificent department store in the world (Pound, 1960; Honeycombe, 1984).

4. For further examples see Nava (1998).

5. Lecture given on 'Erotic Dancing in Central London 1911–1919' at the Institute of Historical Research, London, 22 June 2001.

6. Only months later he was to be a major instigator of the Marconi scandal, often compared with the Dreyfus case in terms of its anti-Semitism and wider political importance.

7. This is developed in much greater detail in Nava (1998).

8. Both were writers. Violet was daughter of Alice Keppel, mistress of Edward VII. Vita, wife of Harold Nicolson, was a few years later to be the lover of Virginia Woolf and designer of the celebrated garden at Sissinghurst.

9. West herself seems to have been more ambivalent than her heroine Ellen. Her unfinished *Cousin Rosamund*, written at the end of her life, includes a disconcertingly racist representation of Rosamund's Middle Eastern husband.

10. Although essentialist in today's terms, this view was also held by some African American intellectuals of the period; see for instance Alain Locke, editor of *The New Negro* (1968 [1925]), and Paul Robeson, celebrated actor, singer and political activist (Dyer, 1986; Duberman, 1989). See Davey (1999) for further discussion of Cunard.

11. E.g. in *A Passage to India* (1924) and *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1966 [1905]).

12. Raymond Williams (1989) draws attention to the link between early 20th-century European migrants and modernist art, literature and political practice. See also the valuable and less widely known contribution of Davey (1999).

13. From Auden's journal quoted in Porter (1998).

14. Walkowitz claims that 90 percent of the audience for Maude Allan's erotic oriental 'Vision of Salome' performances at the Palace Theatre in the years before the war were women (Institute of Historical Research lecture, June 2001).

15. For instance the anti-slavery and philanthropic movements.

16. In addition to E.M. Forster see, for example, D.H. Lawrence, Elisabeth Bowen. See also Lesley Hall on sexual anxieties of the time (1991).

17. Phyllis Lassner (1998) has suggested that 1920s fictional accounts tended to feminize the Jewish man.

18. The distinctive pattern and distribution of power in the relationship between white men and 'other' women are not addressed in this article, except implicitly. For discussion of this see the postcolonial literature on empire and race, for example Stoler (1996).

19. For instance 50 percent of British-born men of Afro-Caribbean descent now have white partners (Modood et al., 1997). This is in marked contrast to the USA where the estimated figure of comparable black–white relationships is 2 percent. The proportions of British-born women of Afro-Caribbean descent and men and women from the different Asian communities with partners of white Anglo descent are not as high but are growing rapidly.

20. This is not to deny the continuation of xenophobia and conflict, but these views are no longer as dominant. However, the climate since 11 September 2001 has changed significantly. This article was written before the event. For further discussion of the normalization of mixed relationships, see Nava (1999b).

21. In order to underline the historical and geographical specificity of these moods it is worth pointing out that music videos and many TV commercials made for UK audiences encourage the presentation of mixed race couples whereas in the USA this is still taboo.

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