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visceral cosmopolitanism: gender, culture and the normalisation of difference

Mica Nava; Berg, Oxford, 2007, 224pp., ISBN 978 1 84520 243 9, £18.95 (paperback), ISBN 978 1 84520 242 2, £55.00 (hardback)

Although located within the recent trend for new research on cosmopolitanism, this book does not dwell on its commonly known links with globalisation processes, human rights, inter- and trans-national relations, and tourism and elites, among others. Instead, its contribution is incisive insights into the intimate, unconscious, domestic, vernacular and emotional experience of cosmopolitanism. Focusing on cosmopolitanism as a 'structure of feeling' that swings between sites of deviance and sites of urban normality, Mica Nava explores the threads of various narratives following a time line from the early twentieth century to the 1990s. Through these stories she unpacks snapshots of the processes that built up a cosmopolitan predisposition for a city such as London: one that crosses class, gender and racial positions, and where a multiplicity of cultural and political alliances are being constantly orchestrated. The scope of Nava's analysis includes the romance between Diana, Princess of Wales, and Dodi Al Fayed, as well as the links between Argentinean tango, Russian ballet and London's consumer culture as epitomised by the iconic department store Selfridges pre-World War I. She also looks into the everyday experiences of wartime, racial imagery and the fascination with modernity – as represented by the United States' 'black' soldiers and popular culture (dance, jazz and film), as well as British fiction with its take on the experience of migration and how it has blended 'sexual thinking' with notions of 'race'. The fascinating autobiographical last chapter demonstrates this thinking in practice. Here we explore a detailed intermingled history of cosmopolitanism and Mica Nava's own life story, providing an insight into how it does indeed translate into specific everyday practices feeding into both familial lives and lines.

A recurring theme is Nava's concern with a lack of investigation into the question of gender by cosmopolitanist theorists. Nava is interested, more specifically, in

the role of women in strengthening this visceral cosmopolitanism throughout London's everyday unfolding. Nava's analysis leads her to argue that 'women, both as authors and as characters, were on the whole more sympathetic to outsiders than were men' (p. 107). This, and the idea that 'women were more likely to identify with the migrants, who like themselves were often marginalised and denied power in the overlapping regimes of white and male superiority' (p. 99), raises questions about the specificity of the women she is talking about, the ones she is not (the non-cosmopolitans) and the specific contexts and convergence of social forces that allow such openness. Nava focuses on a series of scenarios where this rationale is at work: from the reduction of 'available' men as a demographic aftermath of the two world wars, to the quite evident twentieth-century gendered patterns of migration and the insight into women's exposure to 'the global flows of popular modernity, as shoppers, readers, and dance-hall and cinema-goers, ... [women] were more likely to encounter and embrace the narratives and fashions of "elsewhere": of the new, the foreign and the different' (p. 98).

Here is one of the few academic studies into London's cosmopolitan cultural history. Its significance lies in its willingness to complicate an analysis of racism and anti-racism by seriously confronting the experiences of people relating beyond the simplistic different/same dichotomy. While keeping a finger on the wound of racist practices, ideologies and stereotypes, as well as the processes of racialisation that accompany cosmopolitanism, Nava manages to focus on its attraction and openness towards forms, subjects, objects and representations of otherness. Nava shrewdly stresses that 'throughout the [twentieth] century, empathy, hospitality, inclusivity, conviviality and the allure of difference in English culture have *always* coexisted with the most hostile manifestations of racialisation' (p. 7). She wants to rescue cosmopolitanism as one other, mainly positive, visceral attitude that is possible to trace in the quotidian and vernacular life of the big city. It is, she writes, 'the continuity not only of co-residence but of *interaction*, of mutual acknowledgement and desire, (...) what marks out domestic and vernacular cosmopolitanism' (p. 13).

Why London? While Nava acknowledges the similarities between London and other big urban centres like New York, Chicago, Paris or Amsterdam in terms of cultural/racial mixing and postcolonial relations, she emphasises London's uniqueness, with a characteristic geographical organisation that has allowed all sorts of classes and peoples to live in fair proximity to each other thanks to schools distribution. Therefore, although inequalities are rife, the scattered dispersion of middle and working classes, foreigners and natives, as well as processes of gentrification have all contributed to an intimate proximity and familiarity allowing spaces for interdependence, everyday participation, political mobilisation and the performance of 'mutuality'. *Visceral Cosmopolitanism* is most enjoyable for its appreciation of the magnificence of a city (and its

inhabitants daily doings). In the contradictory movement of embracing and 'suffocating' otherness, the city somehow renders itself domesticated by, and responds viscerally to the exposure to proximity, the vernacular and the allure of difference.

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third wave feminism and television: Jane puts it in a box

Merri Lisa Johnson, editor; I.B. Tauris, London, 2007, 224pp., ISBN 9781845112462, £15.99 (paperback)

The edited collection *Third Wave Feminism and Television* sets out to explore the 'contradictions and reciprocities between feminism and television' (back cover) in the realm of the pleasure/danger debate. This debate is nothing new; Johnson equates it to the 'sex wars' from earlier generations of feminists. However, what the collection claims – through Johnson's introduction – is to look at this debate through the lens of third-wave feminism. Unfortunately, the essays never sufficiently develop a working definition of third-wave feminism. As such, the collection, although referencing third-wave texts, does not critically engage with these texts to address how the third wave brings something different to the analysis of television. The essays are, in general, concerned with highly polished dramas such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The L Word* and *Six Feet Under* and their feminist (sometimes highly personal) reading. These readings have less to do with the rigour of utilizing a third-wave feminist lens than seeking out the pleasure of the pleasure/danger debate. As Johnson states in her introduction, '*Third Wave Feminism and Television* belongs almost solely to this side' of the debate.

Indeed, by setting the collection on the side of the '*sex radical media critics or visual pleasure libertarians*' (p. 16) Johnson stifles the pretext to which the collection's title alludes. The oxymoronic notion of a one-sided debate rejects any dissenters to ensure that the view of media as an 'insidious form of indoctrination' is brushed firmly under the carpet of the play and pleasure that can be extracted from the viewing. Although Johnson agrees that there is still work to be done in raising consciousness, she asks 'for those who get it, we want to know, *what else is there to say?*' (p. 14), and it is here that the collection misses its opportunity to fulfil the ambitions of the title in opting to have its say through an overwhelmingly personal and individualistic approach.