

The Ideological Origins of Marketplace Oases

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore how cosmopolitanism became strategically divorced from its roots in world citizenship imagination during the infancy of modern consumer culture giving rise to the other-directed, postemotional, and market-based variant that persists indefinitely today. By drawing upon historical data from retail operations during *the Belle Époque* (1871-1914), and specifically the commodification of the imagined geographies of “the Orient” by the early British department store, we identify ideological antecedents to the current commodification of otherness and the valorisation of a panoply of foreign and anti-structural retreats from the provincial, familiar, and mundane. In doing so, our cultural-historical approach, first, dovetails with recent calls in ICR for attentiveness to the historical contexts from which contemporary discourses of consumption emerge (Bonsu, 2009; Bryce et al. 2013; Karababa and Ger, 2011). Here, we build a case for what we call historically-led “conceptual instantiation”, a process of extending, clarifying, complicating or dimensionalising an extant concept through retroactively making sense of and problematising how it first became instantiated in the particularities of time and space. Second, our research contributes to a nascent stream of work on marketplace oases for aesthetic experiences and utopic praxis (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, & Bradshaw, 2012; Roux, 2014) by theorising how fantasy and enchantment are not encountered through micro-emancipatory market venues alone but through their embeddedness in and interaction with wider macro-social structures and ongoing relations with collective history and geography.

We focus on the interpellation of an emergent middle class of consumers to the exoticism of the Orient by Liberty of London at the gestational period of contemporary consumer culture, illustrating how cosmopolitan ideals became reconfigured as an ideology of consumption conducive to global capital rather than world citizenship ethics. Based on a process of extraction, creolisation, dechronisation, and commodification, we explore how Liberty and others at the time instantiated bourgeois consumers’ zeal for imported goods and styles perceived to be foreign simply because of their very foreignness. This laid the material and spatial groundwork for the phenomenological operation of “capitalist cosmopolitanism” (Pieterse, 2006) or what, we argue, might be better considered “heteropolitanism” (i.e. self-realisation by consuming “otherness” through the market rather than realising true “worldliness” through ethos). To assist in our identification and retroactive conceptualisation of heteropolitanism, we draw from Foucault’s (1986) concept of heterotopia, which denotes social spaces that are ‘different’ to other spaces. Heterotopias exist as “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault, 1986: 24). Here, beyond the creolization of the Orient with British tastes, we explore Liberty’s blending of temporalities where imagery of otherness is assembled from a collage of semi-mythical histories. We also approach aspects of Liberty’s design influence as both a challenge and an abutment to the incipient rationalization of the marketplace. Liberty’s co-optation of otherness and exoticism came at just the right time to allow modern industrial capitalism to reconcile its ideological contradictions; particularly, the

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conflict between objective mechanical efficiencies supported by the rationalistic ethic of homo economicus and the burgeoning awareness that 'new' consumers' desires are based on subjective feelings, fantasies, and fictive frameworks of self-conceptions and lifestyle goals.

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