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Cartographies of Belonging: The Marketisation of Desire through Media, Practice and Place

Sarah Cefai

Abstract

Articles in this themed section offer critical engagement with globalised flows of cultural practice and the resultant formations of identity that manifest (in) transnational and national contexts of place. This Introduction outlines a rationale for thinking about the particular matter of style as an articulation of structures of desire. In their discussion of style these articles register on-going changes in the global order of desire, evident through the marketisation of desire and its attendant inscription of the political conditions of subjectivity. The disciplinary manifestation of the shift to the 'more-than-human' as a pinnacle of postmodern, globalised relations between identity, economy and place presents a new threshold for gender and cultural studies scholarship. Through their study of cultural objects as diverse as fish, femme and feeling, authors problematise the relationship between cartographies of belonging and the force of the nation in the marketisation of desire.

Introduction

Articles in this themed section engage the 'present as a conjuncture' (Hall and Massey 2010, 57) through at least two shifts in the organisation of desire. First, these articles register on-going changes in the global order of desire. The decentring of the 'West' coincides with the global expansion of capitalism and its relocation and reorientation of desire. Each article

assesses a cultural practice that is a product of the marketisation of desire and its attendant inscription of belonging and the political conditions of subjectivity. Second, and related to changes in the global order of desire in neoliberal times, is an emerging shift from the ‘less-than-humane’ to the ‘more-than-human’ (see Probyn in this themed section). The shift to the more-than-human as a pinnacle of postmodern, globalised relations between identity, economy and place presents a new threshold for scholarship in gender and cultural studies. The practices and representations examined in this themed section do not necessarily seek to profit but exist, nevertheless, through the formation of markets. This Introduction outlines a rationale for thinking about authors’ analyses of cultural objects as diverse as fish, femme and feeling as studies in the production of markets of social and cultural belonging. In particular, I suggest that the generation of style through media, practice and place sutures cartographies of belonging to the marketisation of desire.

Geography, gender and cultural studies

Cultural and gender studies scholarship often engages issues of space and place without prioritising spatiality as an object of study. Meanwhile, theorising space and place, specifically in relation to modernist questions of identity and epistemology, has been a defining achievement of social and cultural geography. For Jon Stratton and Ien Ang (1996) the inter-, anti- or trans- disciplinary predicament of cultural studies as a collective mode of enquiry resists the teleological inheritance of disciplines. This themed section invites new ways to perceive the spatiality of belonging through cultural practice, embracing the methodological diversity and intellectual plurality characteristic of cultural studies.

The openness which ‘demarcate[s] the *distinctiveness* of cultural studies’ is ripe for an ‘increasingly elusive’ use ‘by a diverse and heterogeneous constituency’ (361, italics in original). Accordingly, the problem of cultural studies’ openness is the risk of its

concretisation of power relations. Indeed, the ‘internationalization of cultural studies’ (362) partakes less in a diverse and heterogeneous constituency than in the reproduction of the Anglo-American hegemony of US academe. It is here that geographical attentiveness to space and place buffers the Anglo-American hegemony that ‘derives its effectivity from a self-presentation as universal, one that does not acknowledge its own particularity’ (364).

Scholarship on globalisation within geography is informed by the ‘cultural turn’ (Barnett 2002), yet cultural studies is consistently accused of failing to reflect the global scale of cultural production and consumption (Frank 1997). This themed section arises from the symposium ‘Glocalising Sex and Gender: Consumption, Culture, Practice’, enacting a challenge to the implied imperialism in much Anglo-American discourse through a turn to the ‘local’ (e.g. Jackson 2004; Pratt and Rosner 2006) and the ‘material’ (Law and Mol 2008).

Feminist discourses critique the juxtaposition between the ‘global’ as that which moves and the ‘local’ as that which is fixed as reproducing scales of cultural landscape that are highly gendered (Massey 1994; Morris 1998). The globality of globalisation is further described and often prescribed by the object under study (Jackson 2004). Focusing on locally-embedded behaviours of transnational bodies, articles in this themed section eschew the idea that globalisation is ‘a matter of a set of Western networks that spread out to colonise distant places’ (Law and Mol 2008, 139).

The Anthropocene is an engagement with the global that seeks to avoid both the Western bias of globalisation theory and the anthropomorphism of Western theory. Elspeth Probyn’s article illustrates how the assemblage form of belonging in the more-than-human readily privileges the processual nature of identity in relation to multiple forms of life—a project Probyn places as starting in Foucault’s critique of anthropomorphic epistemology in his conclusion to *The Order of Things* (1970). Through understanding gender as a relation and not ‘a thing’, gender studies lends itself to more-than-human inquiry. Decentring the

anthropomorphism of thought is tied directly to decentring identity as the central organising term of material agency. Probyn highlights the potential of interdisciplinary thought to foreground agency as relational or moving (see also Butler 2000).

Cartographies of belonging: style

Matters of style—ways of being and doing—articulate the parameters of identity politics where identity is only ever liminally embodied and always ‘becoming’ (Ang 2000). Gender and cultural studies’ cartographies of belonging have a strong tradition in the study of surfaces (Probyn 1996) and ‘the glossy surfaces of style’ (Hebdige 1979, 18), fostering adjacent lines of inquiry into how style relates to questions of identity, power and agency. In ‘Women following fish in a more-than-human world’, Probyn conceives of style in her discussion on ways of: fishing; preparing and packaging; feeding the fish; marketing and selling; generating a tourist industry; as well as cooking. Styles of taste are an implicit destination for the tuna. The taste of tuna manifests at multiple points of consumption that contribute to the assemblage of human-fish relations. Through storytelling, Probyn collates perspectives and correlates biographical narrative with the logic of industry and other stakeholders in markets of taste.

In ‘White gloves, feminist fists: Race, nation, and the feeling of ‘vintage’ in femme movements’ Ulrika Dahl collects stories, ethnographically and through interviews, putting them into dialogue with the queer academic and cultural archive. Cultural styles of self-presentation express the tactility of sexual belonging (Cefai 2009). In Dahl’s discussion of the relationships between feminine dress, sexuality, race, nation and space, ‘vintage’ rapidly emerges as a point of connection and vehicle for cultural enunciation in a networked set of relations replete with fantasies of national belonging.

Cross dressing performance in film and theatre is a style of gendered performance that is also a way of embodying the Chinese nation. The impersonation of female characters by male actors—the traditional Chinese *dan*—is a nationalised genre that narrates the identity of place and its forms of belonging. In ‘Performance and the politics of gender: transgender performance in contemporary Chinese films’ He Chengzhou makes the audience a central coordinate in structures of heteronormativity, analysing how crossing gender implicates other crossings of spatial and temporal categorisations of belonging.

The connection between genre and belonging is foregrounded in Jane Park’s examination of how ‘Oriental style’ problematises the conditions of representation in the US network sitcom genre. In ‘The failure of Asian American representation in *All-American Girl* and *The Cho Show*’ Park critically examines styles of performance in sitcom and comedy genres of TV that pit racial, ethnic and cultural differences alongside and sometimes against those of gender and sexuality. Through analysing these juxtapositions in terms of US national ideology, Park highlights how the racialised limits of representation are shored up by Margret Cho’s adoption of a queer sexual style.

The L Word shares the ideological constraints of representation identified by Park but from the vantage point of a ‘multicultural’, white queer neoliberalism. In ‘Feeling and the production of lesbian space in *The L Word*’, I identify how the network TV drama series *The L Word* (2004-2009) packages the experience of an imagined lesbian audience into characters’ stories, producing a relational lesbian space. Aligning sexual style with emotional style, I argue that the visibility of lesbian sexual style can be conceptualised effecting conjunction with the visibility of feeling.

Forces in the marketisation of desire: nations

That the nation-state is ‘not the terrain which governs the disposition of the whole structure’ does not mean that the nation-state has ‘disappeared’ (Hall 2003). The erosion of state regulation by privatised governance and the globalised market economy makes way for the reappearance of the nation-state through the emergence of the markets *as* a nationalised technology of governance (Marazzi 2007). While the transformation of cultural practices by markets is evidence for the divestment of state power, this themed section illustrates the salience of the nation as a recursive feature in the organisation of desire by markets, riffing two major intellectual trajectories: the Marxist idea that capitalism expands markets of consumption; and, the Foucauldian idea that the state seeks to regulate desire through heterosexuality. Here, sexual style is a driver in the formation of markets: ‘The post-Fordist producer does not produce *for* a future demand, but *from* an already existing demand’ (127).

By attending to cartographies of belonging the articles gathered here are engagements with the reappearance of the nation in the marketisation of desire. Even when nationality is not the purported subject of study or desire, styles of feeling, taste and performance, texture and touch, articulate markets that relate selves back to communities through their manifestations of national belonging in its symbolic, discursive, emotional and geographical form. The transformation of state power through marketisation disarticulates associated models of power that have for many years now been attached to identity—gender, sexuality, class and race (Gilbert 2003). Feminist scholarship needs to incorporate not only the intersectional production of belonging but the way in which the relations of desire that make belonging possible are increasingly farmed out to the corporate sector, to industry, to mainstream culture.

The ‘failure’ of Asian American representation can be understood as the failure of these representations to create a market. It is, in Park’s analysis, the inauthenticity of the ‘Asian American’ that blocks the formation of a market. An alternative and potentially more

authentic Asian American style would make visible the social structures that force the 'choice' between Asian and American. The use of predominantly white queer sexuality to legitimate Cho's national citizenship jars against Korean American and Asian American identities reframed anachronistically outside American culture. The neoliberal market of nationalised sexuality is a conduit for Cho's becoming that puts her in proximity to, but also marks the impossibility of, her potential Oriental difference.

The representation of sexual diversity as an achievement of neoliberal nationalism is integral to the authenticity of the lesbian experience in the 'intimate public' (Berlant 2008, 5) of *The L Word*. Lauren Berlant explains: 'An intimate public operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires' (5). *The L Word* tells its queer and lesbian viewers that there is 'a market addressed to them' (5). The marketisation of desire renders viewers participants in an intimate public whose sexual styles and styles of feeling have become a site of national interest.

The nostalgia of the vintage cultural aesthetic figures an imagined past through a 'culture of circulation' (Berlant 2008, 5). The paradoxical temporality of 'vintage' seeks political and aesthetic inspiration in what is retrospectively imagined as the pre-feminist moment of post-war domestic femininity. This Anglo-American style of feeling recalls the past in the present along the lines of race. The desire for belonging registers the outsideness of longing to belong (Probyn 1996) that constitutes a market for the 'feeling of vintage'. As a technology of emplacement 'vintage' reproduces whiteness as the ground of national belonging while reinvigorating narratives of domestic femininity and acting as a rejoinder to the 'invisibility' of femme sexuality and the postfeminist backlash that renders feminism in a past that has passed.

Certain primary geo-political coordinates of public reception to transgendered performance in China demonstrate the force of the nation in the marketisation of desire. The *dan* style of performance is revered by the Chinese establishment, yet the same national discourses about international relations between people and place position transgender as a site of national ambivalence. The Occidental image of the feminised Oriental Other is a spectre in the masculinity of the Chinese national character. He positions the contemporary market for popular transgender style as a swell of national sentiment that articulates Chinese gender ideology. In contrast, notions of liberal feminism are central to reimagining the legend of Hua Mulan for a US market. The logic of consumerism renders Hua Mulan relatable as a scene of American national belonging by recasting her gender transgression as a narrative of individualism.

The force of the nation even transpires in the Anthropocene. The market for fish remakes national belonging by making histories in place and narrating these histories as stories of attachment. Human-fish relations of desire are articulated by the transactions of international fish markets, which condense the local and the global while marketing fish of a certain order: fish with a corporate, national, ethical, dietary past. Probyn observes fishing as a politics of transnational relations not located at spatial borders but in dispersed geographies, such as in the tuna pens at Port Lincoln in South Australia.

From belonging to being-with

The 'ideology of individualism' (Gilbert 2003) is a defining feature of the reappearance of nationalism. As Christian Marazzi (2007, 129) explains: 'While in the post-Fordist regime the role of the State is actually becoming less prominent as a distributor of income, it does acquire a strategic importance as a purveyor of immaterial abilities founded on knowledge and on the valorization of the individual (or of a certain geographical region) within the global market'.

It is ironic then that Probyn's opening frame, the more-than-human, should catalyse an ethics of belonging when the markets in which being-with-tuna is made have at their base an unforgiving model of the individual.

This shift provokes the question of what happens to the less-than-human that has been a way to comprehend sex and race for many decades. The articles brought together in this themed section outline ways of living with and attending to cultural practices and their delimitations of identity. They draw attention to the contribution of cultural studies and feminist theories of gender, race and power to understanding how cultural styles serve as a conduit for the exchange in meaning between national and other forms of belonging that increasingly are constituted as markets structuring relations of desire.

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Notes on Contributor

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