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Expropriating the Authentic: Cultural Politics in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*[*]

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Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* is, among other things, a novel about the ideal of authenticity. There are moments in the novel at which the authentic is invoked, by both the dominant group and minorities, as a sign of identification and recognition in cultural practices and regimes of representation: both groups tussle over the sign, reinscribe it, trying to turn it into a privileged site of cultural struggle. This explains why these are also moments of contestations and antagonisms marked visibly by domination and resistance, normalisation and subversion. More importantly, both groups' attempts to expropriate and appropriate the sign are governed by what Stuart Hall has called "an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of

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origin'" (226), and it is this "law of origin" which in turn informs much of the import of the ideal of authenticity. Ironically, these moments of policing and surveillance, moments when the definitions of the authentic are under intense scrutiny, are also moments at which the ideal of the authentic proves itself to be subversive: it problematises, on the one hand, the hegemonic positioning of the dominant group as agents of representation in cultural practices, and interrogates, on the other, the legitimacy of minorities to monopolise over the production and reproduction of the authentic. But above all else, amidst all the sound and fury of antagonistic contentions, the authentic also re-creates itself into a meeting place, perhaps "a third space," in Homi Bhabha's terms, for the negotiation of cultural identity, thereby dismantling the Manichean structure of cultural representation. This aspect of the authentic becomes profoundly productive especially in an urban space like London, the setting of Kureishi's novel, where diasporic experiences constitute crucially the everyday life of the immigrants.

The novel begins in an autobiographical mode in which Karim Amir, the narrator-protagonist, introduces himself as a character inhabiting an in-between world:

> . . . I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of English, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care—Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. (3)

The autobiographical mode should be accorded some significance. It suggests a process of reflexion, a state of self-consciousness. Lodged in a neither-nor plight of existence and between two worlds, Karim goes epistemologically all the way to the root of his existence, questions his own cultural belonging, and comes out with a new sensibility of his identity. Born to an Anglo-Indian family, his father being an Indian immigrant and his mother an English, he realises that he belongs to "a funny kind of English," "a new breed," as he calls himself, but this new breed also signposts a new identity which is "at once plural and partial," in the words of Salman Rushdie (15). The new identity also affords him a new perspective, shifting and

ambivalent as it may seem, allowing him to turn his back on the static, self-content conception of the authentic. In the in-between world of "the doubleness and cultural intermixtual" (Gilroy 4), an alternative understanding of the authentic has become imperative. Obviously, this is also a world characterised by hybridity, which, in Robert J. C. Young's recent formulation, "makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different" (26).[1] Hence "the impossibility of essentialism" (27). Moving around in this in-between world, Karim finds himself enmeshed in constant struggles and conflictual tensions with two forces that endeavour to confine him within the policed borders of definitions of his ethnic and cultural belonging carefully mapped out for him. He therefore becomes "restless and easily bored."

Karim later finds his way into theatrical performance. When for the first time in his acting career he is given the role of Mowgly in a play adapted from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, he is asked by Jeremy Shadwell, the director, to put on what he deems to be "an authentic accent," one which befits Mowgly who was born in India:

> . . . But just when I was feeling at home in the loin-cloth and boot polish,and when I'd learned my lines before anyone else and was getting as competent as a little orang-utan on the scaffolding, I saw that our conflicts hadn't ended. Shadwell took me aside and said, "A word about the accent, Karim. I think it should be an authentic accent."
>
> "What d'you mean authentic?"
>
> "Where was our Mowgly born?"

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[1] The meanings of hybridity have been exhausted in recent cultural criticism and postcolonial discourses, thanks principally to Homi Bhabha's polemical celebration of the notion in his *The Location of Culture*. See particularly the chapter entitled "Signs Taken for Wonders" (102-22). Bhabha's position has recently been challenged by Aijaz Ahmad. For Ahmad hybridity is "so vacuous a notion" as it suggests "to replace all historicity with mere contingency; to lose all sense of specificity in favour of the hyper-reality of an eternal and globalised present; and to dispense with all structural persistence of the longue duree so remorselessly that the present becomes both opaque and wholly self-referential" (17). See also the useful and persuasive reconsideration of the notion by Young (1-28).

"India."

"Yes. Not Orpington. What accent do they have in India?"

"Indian accents."

"Ten out of ten."

"No, Jeremy. Please, no."

"Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience."

I could hardly believe it. Even when I did believe it we discussed it several times, but he wouldn't change his mind.

"Just try it," he kept saying as we went outside the rehearsal room to argue.

"You're very conservative, Karim. Try it until you feel comfortable as a Bengali. You're supposed to be an actor, but I suspect you may just be an exhibitionist."

"Jeremy, help me, I can't do this."

He shook his head. I swear, my eyes were melting.

A few days passed without the accent being mentioned again. . . .

Next time it was mentioned the entire cast was present.

"Now do the accent," Shadwell suddenly said. "I trust you've been rehearsing at home."

"Jeremy," I pleaded. "It's a political matter to me." (146-47)

What Karim considers "a political matter" obviously turns out to be a matter of commodification for Shadwell: his demand for authenticity from a novice actor of South Asian descent is governed by a logic of marketplace. He believes that ethnic authenticity can be turned into a fetishised object and reproduced for circulation. He makes his motivation clear and succinct as he reveals to Karim that he has been cast "for authenticity and not for experience." In other words, the casting of Karim in the play is primarily determined by his ethnicity, his "racial" belonging; and Karim must therefore live up to the expectation of the director and, presumably, the audience, to justify the rationale of the choice. The authentic, or the ethnic otherness, is then "sought after for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures it can offer" (Rutherford 11). Similar observations have also been made by Paul Gilroy in the case of black music:

> Authenticity enhances the appeal of selected cultural commodities and has become an important element in the mechanism of the mode of racialisation

> necessary to making non-European and non-American musics acceptable items in an expanded pop market. The discourse of authenticity has been a notable presence in the mass marketing of successive black folk-cultural forms to audiences. (97)

However, as Iain Chambers has pointed out, "[s]ubordinate subjects have invariably been ordained to the stereotyped immobilism of an essential 'authenticity', in which they are expected to play out roles, designated for them by others . . . for ever" (38). Thus the authentic belongs to one of those colonial imaginaries which are "constitutive of social relations and realities" (Pieterse and Parekh 5) in the Manichean world shaped by colonial outlook. This certainly rings true if we consider the ideological implications of the play in which Karim appears: originated from the work of an imperialist writer, the play itself is a cultural product of conspicuous colonial nostalgia. Latent in Shadwell's logic of commodification may then be an unpronounced desire: a desire to contain minorities within certain social and cultural space, to limit their space of representation. This strategy of containment also serves well to perpetuate the stereotyping of minorities, as seen in Shadwell's belief that there is a typical Indian English and that Karim, to be authentic on stage, must recycle this stereotyped image in order to make himself marketable and to exact the exchange value from the image. Stereotyping promises continued marginalisation. It is an act of intellectual inertia, but as often as not, it is also strategically deployed by the dominant race and culture to represent minorities as dangerous, threatening others, for what lies hidden in the act of stereotyping is a fear of transgression: the minorities must be content with the images imparted on them and are thus forbidden to transgress the boundaries of cultural representation. To encourage minorities to reproduce the authentic is then to make sure that the boundaries of cultural representation are properly policed and have not been trespassed. Unfortunately, the meanings of all this are too intricate for Karim. When he reminds Shadwell that to ape the Indian accent is for him a political matter, he fails to realise that for Shadwell this too is a political matter. The value of the authentic obviously goes beyond its role as a fetishised cultural commodity but lies in its potential as a political tool for the dominant race and culture to continue their marginalisation of the minority other. "The

observed, the other, is once again spoken for and positioned, and thereby reproduced as a domesticated difference within the occidental ordering of the world. The other has no voice, is not allowed to speak and define her or his sense of being (or authenticity) in the contemporary conditions of existence" (Chambers 81-82).

Reluctantly Karim mimicks the Indian accent on stage as Mowgly, reproducing what his fellow black actress Tracey calls the "white truth" (181), or what his friend Changez on one occasion refers to as the "white people's thing" (174). He expects some modest praise from his family and friends after his opening night performance:

> So after the opening I ran out of the dressing room to where Dad, in his red waistcoat, was waiting with all the others. None of them looked particularly cheerful. We walked up to the street to a restaurant nearby, and still no one spoke to me. "Well, Dad," I asked, "how did you enjoy yourself? Aren't you glad I didn't become a doctor?"
>
> Like a fool, I'd forgotten that Dad thought honesty a virtue. He was a compassionate man, Dad, but never at the expense of drawing attention to his own opinion.
>
> "Bloody half-cocked business," he said. "That bloody fucker Mr Kipling pretending to whity he knew something about India! And an awful performance by my boy looking like a Black and White Minstrel!"
>
> . . .
>
> Before we sat down in the restaurant Jamila took me aside and kissed me on the mouth. . . .
>
> "You looked wonderful," she said, as if she were speaking to a ten-year-old after a school play. "So innocent and young, showing off your pretty body, so thin and perfectly formed. But no doubt about it, the play is completely neo-fascist—"
>
> "Jammie—"
>
> "And it was disgusting, the accent and the shit you had smeared over you. You were just pandering to prejudices—"
>
> "Jammie—"
>
> "And clichés about Indians. And the accent—my God, how could you do it?I expect you're ashamed, aren't you?"
>
> "I am, actually."
>
> But she didn't pity me; she mimicked my accent in the play. "Actually,

> you've got no morality, have you? You'll get it later, I expect, when you can afford it." (156-57)

It becomes apparent that Karim's performance, his mimicry of what is to be understood as the authentic, has gone completely against the grain with his father Haroon Amir and Jamila, his former lover. They hit straight from the shoulder and he finds himself immediately beleaguered by castigations and hence total rejection. There is a "fear of ideological unsoundness, of inauthenticity" (Collits 65) in their strictures, which makes them feel imperative to reduce their "critical judgement to the morality of threatened 'authenticities', co-option and sell-outs" (Chambers 83). And their critiques are significantly couched in political and moralistic terms: the play itself is imperialist for Haroon and neo-fascist for Jamila; and while Haroon disparages Karim's performance, likening him to a black and white minstrel, Jamila harshly criticises Karim for "pandering to prejudices." It is obvious that in the eyes of Haroon and Jamila, the authentic Shadwell values so much remains no more than a malign distortion, a calculated prejudice, a stereotyped representation resulted from racist invention and imagination. Both Haroon and Jamila unhesitatingly turn themselves into what bell hooks has identified as "cultural overseers" (9), the custodians of an invariant ethnic essence or specificity they think only accessible to them.

This expropriation of the authentic suggests moments of struggle over the rights of representation. If for Shadwell the authentic represents a site of continued domination and marginalisation, it creates for Haroon and Jamila a critical space for cultural resistance and social-political intervention. They may contradict each other in their perceptions of authenticity, but interestingly, they both are invariably seduced towards a belief in the pivotal role of the authentic in the politics of cultural representation.

When Haroon and Jamila criticise Karim for catering to white taste, for authenticating white truth about themselves, they place their criticisms within the politics of insiderism: they believe they occupy a subject position "from which their 'voice' seems to them to be receiving its authority to 'speak'" (Griffiths 82). In postcolonial terms, this would be a conviction in their privileged, native position "to reassert their pre-colonized cultures and to struggle for the recuperation of their cultural difference and its resilience

in and through the local and specific" (75-76). The local and specific, namely the authentic, must remain the privileged site of cultural struggle for the marginalised and must therefore be vigilantly guarded against the expropriation and exploitation by the dominant power.

Apparently, like Shadwell, Haroon and Jamila too are obsessed with the authentic, with the pure, untainted, indigenous essence of the other, which they believe is fixed, unified, and unmediated and which is always out there ready to be recovered or recuperated. It is their position, not Shadwell's, to define this essence, a space entitled exclusively to the other, which must not be colonised by the dominant race and culture. This recuperative process is also a process of mimesis based on essentialising difference and privileging the role of the other in the reproduction of the cultural different.

Most interestingly, it is in fact the same politics of difference which underpins Shadwell's attempt to urge Karim to recycle authenticity for cultural consumption. But as I have already noted, his attempt will eventually result in stereotyping and continued marginalisation; the cultural other will forever be confined to the category invented and designated by the dominant race and culture. Ironically, when Haroon and Jamila appeal to "cultural/ethnic/ local 'difference' not as an open-ended process but as a preordained fact" (Chow 47), they too unknowingly engage in reproducing the structures of domination and creating the same hierarchical mechanisms that put the other in his or her place. The politics of difference has been unfortunately deployed in accordance with "a logic not unlike that of colonial racism, except that the other has become the self and the values are reversed" (Pieterse and Parekh 9).

This is, however, not to overlook the subversiveness of the politics of difference. It often functions vitally in the attempts of minorities to construct a new language and a critical space to define their identity and to engage in cultural representations. It provides them with moments of self-recognition, moments to recuperate, in Charles Taylor's words, the "distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity" (38). The politics of difference, in this case, necessarily involves a recuperative process in which the authentic, the genuine, is conjured up to heal the many wounds the dominant group have inflicted upon minorities in their entrenchment of cultural hegemony. Taylor also

regards this as a "process of revision," one in which the inculcated images of inferiority of the dominated group are put into question or discarded (66). It is therefore of paramount significance that we recognise in the politics of difference "the potential for forming and defining one's own identity, as an individual, and also as a culture" (42).[2]

This is a position very much shared by Haroon and Jamila. Haroon, in particular, makes this position of his explicitly clear later to the journalist and the photographer who have had an interview with his mistress Eva: "I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian" (263). The tone is unmistakably that of a cultural essentialist, and it carries with it a strong belief in the possibility of embracing his cultural past, of living his Indian way of life in its pure and authentic form. His essentialist position is articulated doggedly in the rhetoric of the politics of difference: that he is different and that, as an Indian man, his way of life must accordingly be unique and specific, even though he has lived most of his life in the West. He believes his Indian essence still remains untainted and authentic over the years as he lives his immigrant life in the United Kingdom. It is an essence which Edward W. Said in his critique of nativism describes as seeming "to stand free not only of the colonizer but of worldly time itself" (*Culture* 228) as if nothing had ever happened. Free of historical time, Haroon's India has been frozen in some unchanging zone of his youthhood memory the moment he left India and has since remained there always

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[2] Edward W. Said would call this phase of identity politics "the combative, assertive stages in the nativist identity," which he thinks "always occur" and are "impossible to avoid" (*Culture* 229), but he points out at the same time that "there is a good deal of promise in getting beyond them, not remaining trapped in the emotional self-indulgence of celebrating one's own identity." His points may be of heuristic value for our following discussions: "There is first of all the possibility of discovering a world not constructed out of warring essences. Second, there is the possibility of a universalism that is not limited or coercive, which believing that all people have only one single identity is—that all the Irish are only Irish, Indians Indians, Africans Africans, and so on ad nauseam.Third, and most important, moving beyond nativism does not mean abandoning nationality, but it does mean thinking of local identity as not exhaustive, and therefore not being anxious to confine oneself to one's own sphere, with its ceremonies of belonging, its built-in chauvinism, and its limiting sense of security" (229).

ready for retrieval. This India he carries with him, he believes, is unmediated by his presence in the West, and non-contaminated, not even by his everyday exposures to the cultural and material life of his immediate environment. The problem with Haroon in fact lies in his failure to realise that the India he thinks he carries with him is in the Derridean sense an always-already "deferred" India; it remains at most what has been described by Hall as "a spiritual, cultural and political metaphor" ("Cultural" 231).

Haroon's politics of difference fails at the same time to reconcile with what Iain Chambers has noted as the modern nomadic identity of the diaspora (68). Many formerly colonised subjects have moved to the cosmopolitan; their presence not only transforms the scenes of the urban space but also brings about changes in power relations between the dominant and the dominated groups in the domain of cultural representation. However, this can never be a one-way movement. It is a process involving, again, as Chambers puts it, "the mutual imbrication of 'us' and 'them'" (86). In other words, "we" too will change, as "they" do, with "our" presence in the social-cultural scenes of the cosmopolitan. This is the historical reality every diaspora must confront: the sign of the authentic can no longer be fixed and stable, but will forever be supplemented and hybridised.[3] This is a journey of impossible return which Chambers so persuasively summarises:

> To return, rather than simply to re-visit or re-view, that is, to apparently turn back and return "fully", to African, Caribbean or Indian roots in pursuit of a displaced and dispersed authenticity today hardly seems feasible. The impossible mission that seeks to preserve the singularity of a culture must

[3] The tone and import here may sound deconstructive, but what I have in mind is something more imperative, something which has been described by Said as "the achievement of an imperial structure of feeling," namely the stability of cultural identity: "The subsequent emergence of such entities as races and nations, of such essences as Englishness and of the Oriental, all of them enjoying the apparent stability of unchanging ontological properties, testifies to the achievement of an imperial structure of feeling that thought and acted as if the world were there for the dividing, the taking, and the holding" ("Third World" 49). Attempts to disregard the hybrid complexity of diaspora identities and to insist on an identity politics of ethnic absolutism may help to reproduce this "imperial structure of feeling," making it possible for the continued marginalisation of the formerly colonised subjects.

> paradoxically negate its fundamental element: its historical dynamic. Post-colonialism is perhaps the sign of an increasing awareness that it is not feasible to subtract a culture, a history, a language, an identity, from the wider, transforming currents of the increasingly metropolitan world. It is impossible to "go home" again. This means to find oneself subject to ever wider and more complex webs of cultural negotiation and interaction . . . (74)[4]

To insist on his Indian way of life, Haroon practises meditation and philosophises—in fact, commodifies— Orientalism, as his son Karim observes:

> Dad started doing guru gig again, once a week in the house, on Taoism and meditation, like before except that this time Eva insisted people paid to attend. Dad had a regular and earnest young crowd of head-bowers—students, psychologists, nurses, musicians—who adored him, some of whom rang and

[4] We may want to recall here Stuart Hall's already famous formulation of what he calls the two axes or vectors of identity: the vector of similarity and continuity, and the vector of difference and rupture.To make explicit what he means by this, allow me to quote him in length. "There are," according to Hall, "at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'.The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people of shared history and ancestry hold in common.Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (223). "There is, however," he continues, "a second, related but different view of cultural identity.This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened— 'what we have become'.We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side—the ruptures and discontinuities. . ." (225).This second position is actually what underlies most current discourses on cultural identity: "In this perspective," again according to Hall, "cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not once-and-for-all. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return" (227). This is more or less the position taken up by more recent revisions of identity politics, certainly one upon which Chambers bases his description of the journey of impossible return.

> visited late at night in panic and fear, so dependent were they on his listening kindness. There was a waiting list to join his group. For these meetings I had to hoover the room, light the incense, greet the guests like a head waiter and serve them Indian sweets. Eva also insisted on Dad improving the service: she got him to consult esoteric library books early in the morning before work and asked him at breakfast. (115)

Haroon's practices are governed and mediated by the compelling logic of commodity production and consumption: they are compared to the dining rituals in a restaurant. Even more unusual is his resort to Taoism, a Chinese rather than Indian philosophy, as a guide to quell the "panic and fear," namely the disorderliness, of his clients. This perhaps signifies that cultural mediation will inevitably remain an integral part of diasporic experiences. But in most cases Haroon's insistence on his Oriental specificity ends up with simple-minded comparisons like "Indian men have lower centres of gravity than Accidental (sic) men" (193), or with self-congratulating clichés of cultural difference, condemning the West for having "no deepening in culture, no accumulation of wisdom, no increase in the way of the spirit" (264), and what not.

Perhaps we should not belittle the consequence of mediation here. Perhaps this is the reason why Haroon thinks he is able to live a life between two worlds: the West of the material and the East of the spiritual. He has no desire at all to return physically to India, and will live and die in the West even though he remains "to all intents and purposes an Indian man." If he returns at all to his India, his return is made metaphorically through mediation, through philosophising and meditation, and even through his working on "a book about his childhood in India" (193). Less fortunate is the case of Anwar, Haroon's friend since the days of his childhood. So deeply ingrained in his Indian tradition and Muslim fatalism that Anwar obstinately insists on doing things in "our way" (60), including making arrangements for his only daughter Jamila's marriage. "Our way is firm," he insists, "she must do what I say or I will die. She will kill me" (60).

"Our way" means the authentic, unmediated way, but "our way" is also the way which eventually leads to a series of tragedy. Despite her protests and various attempts to elude the marriage, Jamila at last marries Changez, the man her uncle in Bombay has picked for her. Anwar's "way" of enforc-

ing his will too is not without historical precedents: he has been greatly inspired by Gandhi, as he rather whimsically puts it, "If Gandhi could shove out the English from India by not eating, I can get my family to obey me by exactly the same" (60). So he goes on the "major Gandhi diet" (60), as Karim calls it, and starves himself violently until "his nose and cheekbones protruded as never before," and he becomes "so pale that no one could possibly call him a darkie or black bastard" (79). In face of his deteriorating health, Jamila finally bends to his will, but the marriage turns out to be disastrous. Changez, Jamila's husband from Bombay, a funny looking young Indian with a withered left hand, may in this context be read as symbolising the reality of India of Anwar's imagination, as his nickname "Bubble," with some effect of irony, significantly suggests. He cripples and deforms all of Anwar's dreams, and has neither intention nor ability to live up to his expectations. And the destruction is total. Soon Changez is referred to by Anwar as "that fucking, bald, useless cripple" (209), but he puts Anwar to the worse when he is seen with Shinko, a Japanese prostitute he has enamoured, and has a farcical fight with his father-in-law, whacking the poor old man over the head. Anwar dies soon after the incident, "mumbling about Bombay, about the beach, about the boys at the Cathedral school, and calling for his mother" (212).

We must not underestimate the allegorical import of Anwar's episode. Here is an old man who shields himself up with the ideal of authenticity, which finds embodiment in what he calls "our way." The ideal has become a cultural norm, a code of moral behaviour, a belief, so to speak, to consolidate his—and hopefully, his people's—identity, with which he hopes to cope with the social and cultural aberrations—indeed, hybridisations—of diaspora world. He even falls out with his childhood friend Haroon, for example, because he thinks:

> [Haroon] had been seduced by the West, becoming as decadent and lacking in values as the rest of the society. He even listened to pop music, didn't he? "He'll be eating pork pie next," Anwar said. (211)

Anwar is adopting what Rushdie has called a "ghetto mentality," a form of "internal exile": to forget that "there is a world beyond the community" to

which he belongs, and to confine himself "within narrowly defined cultural frontiers" (19). Alongside his insistence on the authentic is obviously his great fear of cultural contamination, a threat which he envisions will eventually dissolve his ethnic self and traditional values. When he hides himself in the nutshell of his ethnic particularity, he begins to cut himself from his immediate social-cultural environment, so much so that he turns himself into something ludicrous and irrational. His unbending insistence on the pure and authentic, as my reading tries to convey, also brings him—and his family—total destruction. And when the pure and authentic, symbolised by Changez who comes freshly all the way from India, engages itself in interactions with other elements in diasporic experience, it mixes with others and changes. "Our way" is simply a way of impossible return. It only exists as part of cultural memory, and as in the case of memory, it cannot be completely, that is, authentically, retraced and retrieved. The story of Anwar sadly offers a compelling image of cultural dislocation in diasporic life.

Let me give one more incident to read Changez allegorically as a deferred origin, the authentic that eludes reexpropriation, as Changez significantly puts it to Karim: "I am not a person who could be successfully impersonated" (231). After his Mowgly show, Karim is expected to play, once again, an ethnic minority in his next public appearance, this time "an immigrant fresh from a small Indian town" (220). Changez naturally makes a perfect model and he is somehow aware of the parallels. He then makes Karim promise not to model the character upon him: "You can't be using my character in your acting business," he warns Karim. "No, no, no, definitely. And if you try and steal me I can't see how we can be friends to talk to each other again" (185). Karim reluctantly gives him his promise, but he soon finds himself helpless without expropriating Changez as his referent, as the sign of the authentic:

> At night, at home, I was working on Changez's shambolic walk and crippled hand, and on the accent, which I knew would sound, to white ears, bizarre, funny and characteristic of India. I'd worked out a story for the Changez character (now called Tariq), eagerly arriving at Heathrow with his gnat-ridden suitcase. . . . (188-89)

Once again Karim positions himself as a complice to reproduce what Tracey, the black actress, describes as the picture "white people already think of us"

(180). Succumbing himself to the logic of commodification, Karim knows very well that "cultural difference sells" (Rutherford 11). However, again he fails to see that the logic of commodification also helps reproduce minorities as cultural others, who continue to be marginalised in the regimes of representation.

But the point I want to make concerns more with Changez's reaction to the reproduction which is modeled on him—Karim actually tries hard but fails to stop him from coming to the show. His reaction is heavily invested with allegorical nuances, for here lies the lesson of the politics of representation. Changez seems to take delight in Karim's performance and not in the least to be able to identify himself in the character portrayed by Karim. "I am glad in your part you kept it fundamentally autobiographical and didn't try the leap of invention into my character," he tells Karim (231). Here is of course a perfect case of deconstruction where one finds the inevitable intervention of the moment of *differance*: the gaping rift created by signification, or representation, is huge and unbridgeable indeed. Changez the authentic becomes something unattainable; he is the origin that cannot be traced back to. He is indeed the lost origin that cannot be identified in the reproduction, even though the reproduction has been made presumably in his image, which undergoes mutations and transformations every time it is reproduced.

The scramble for the authentic also allows it to become a cultural space where two contending forces meet. The tensions are always there, and the moments of cultural struggle continue. But as a meeting place, the authentic also promises chances of negotiation. Specifically, it may serve as a common ground for minorities in the diaspora to reflect upon what Rushdie has described as the "problems of definition":

> What does it mean to be "Indian" outside India? How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified? How should we discuss the need for change within ourselves and our community without seeming to play into the hands of our racial enemies? What are the consequences, both spiritual and practical, of refusing to make any concessions to western ideas and practices? What are the consequences of embracing those ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us? These questions are all a single, existential question: How are we to live in the world? (17-18)

The problems are acute and the questions difficult. They will necessarily involve positioning and call for a more viable cultural politics which is capable of addressing difference and turning ethnic and cultural authenticity into a critically creative force in the regimes of representation. This cultural politics will also recognise the inevitable dialogicality of diasporic life: an immigrant can only sustain his or her identity by negotiating it through dialogue with others. [5]

The Buddha of Suburbia is a novel heavily charged with this sense of reflexivity. In many ways it can in fact be read as Kureishi's attempt to answer the many questions raised by Rushdie. The novel ends with Karim dining in Soho with his family and friends to celebrate his new job, his appearance in a new TV soap opera as a "rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper" (259). This time he is not playing for exoticism; the authentic has been invoked to create a critical space for representing social problems: the play will tangle with more contemporary themes, including abortions and racist attacks. The authentic, in this case, will be inextricably entangled with the social and cultural environment where it takes on a new dimension as it is invoked. It becomes significantly productive when it begins to define itself dialogically. Karim continues to straddle between two worlds, between two old histories, while he is "going somewhere." A strong sense of belonging begins to take on him as he sits in the centre of London, the "old city that I loved," surrounded "by people I loved." In a reflexive mood he thinks of "what a mess everything had been," but he also assures himself that "it wouldn't always be that way" (284).

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[5] The notion of dialogicality is that of Charles Taylor. According to Taylor, it is the dialogicality of human relations that makes and sustains our identity: "Thus my discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. . . . My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others" (34). Taylor may not speak with the situation of diaspora culture in mind; rather, what his project tries to lay out is a politics of recognition to reject, on the one hand, ethnocentrism of all forms, and, on the other, to clear the way for a multicultural society, of which an ideal model would be the diaspora.

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《郊野佛陀》中的文化政治

李有成

摘要

古雷希 (Hanif Kureishi) 的《郊野佛陀》(*The Buddha of Suburbia*) 是一部與眞實性 (the authentic) 理想有關的小說。眞實性在小說中被視爲文化實踐與再現體制中認同與認知的符號，強勢與弱勢族群一再爲此符號爭論不休，並企圖在文化鬥爭中將之轉化爲於己有利的場域。強勢一方固然企圖以此作爲宰制與規範的工具，弱勢一方則視之爲抵抗與顚覆的利器。更重要的是，雙方在徵用或據用這個符號時，其行爲往往受制於霍爾 (Stuart Hall) 所謂的「始源的法則」。這個「始源的法則」正好規範了眞實性理想的大部分內容。

在所謂眞實性的定義一再面臨檢驗的時刻，眞實性也反證其顚覆的一面：它一方面質疑在文化實踐中強勢族群強行自命爲再現的代理人的霸權地位；另一方面它也對弱勢族裔有意壟斷生產及再生產眞實性的合法地位有所保留。但是最值得注意的是，在各種抗爭與對立的喧囂當中，眞實性也將自己轉化爲一個可供強勢與弱勢族群雙方協商文化屬性的交會場所，以解除文化再現中的二元對立結構。古雷希的小說以倫敦爲背景，移民日常生活中的離散經驗是倫敦這個都會空間的景色之一；在這個層面上，眞實性所提供的協商或交會空間自然有其積極而饒富意義的一面。