

Textual Immaturity: Bisexuality, Textuality and Adolescence

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Abstract

The article takes a common stereotype of bisexuality – as ‘immature’—and repurposes it as *textual immaturity*. The adolescent is a temporally in-between figure, sited ambiguously between past and future – a position analogous to that into which bisexuality is cast in monosexist discourse. Thus, bisexualities become a point from which to approach literary texts ‘immaturely’.

The article argues that the positioning of bisexuality as a phase *en route* to fixed monosexual identity is a product of a broader investment in teleological narratives of maturation. Given its distinct relations to narrative temporality when denigrated as ‘immature,’ a critical focus on bisexuality can offer a site for resistance to this restrictive narrativity. *The Buddha of Suburbia* proves an exemplary text. The article reads Hanif Kureishi’s novel, TV adaptation, and David Bowie’s album in order to explore their bisexual textuality.

Keywords: adolescence; bisexuality; heteronormativity; narratives; television

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One way bisexuality is commonly delegitimized is through the claim it is ‘immature.’ The notion that “sexuality develops in a linear fashion, from the undifferentiated, infantile bisexuality to a differentiated, mature monosexuality” persists in contemporary psychoanalytic accounts (Rapoport, 2009, p.292), as well as in broader cultural narratives, and contributes to a pervasive stereotype. Marjorie Garber (1995) has suggested that bisexuality thereby “gets defined as intrinsically immature, as, in a way, the very sign of immaturity” (p.352). This is normalised through institutions such as marriage which, Garber claims, install “the idea that it is ‘normal’ to reach a settled sexual identity, and that that ‘identity’ is either heterosexual or homosexual” (p.343). Bisexual individuals are therefore urged “to put away childish things” (p.352), and mature into a fixed monosexual identity which is recognisable within the hetero/homo binary logic of mainstream sexualities discourse.

As with any reductive stereotype, this can be harmful to bisexual individuals. Thinking epistemologically though, Shiri Eisner (2013) argues that rather than refuting such stereotypes and creating “safe”, “harmless” images of bisexuality in their place, they “should not be taken literally at all, but rather read as metaphors about the subversive potential of bisexuality” (p.43). What happens if, as scholars, activists, friends, lovers and writers, we (currently bi-identified or not) do not “put away childish things” but take seriously the reading of bisexuality as “the very sign of immaturity”? This article repurposes ‘bisexuality as immature’ as *textual immaturity*. Textual immaturity, understood as a form of bisexual textuality (or *bitextuality*), is used to read three versions of *The Buddha of Suburbia*: Hanif Kureishi’s 1990 novel, the 1993 BBC television adaptation, and David Bowie’s 1993 ‘soundtrack.’¹ Considering the adolescent figure, situated ambiguously between past and future, adult and child, authority and subordination, I examine the potential in these texts for

a bisexuality similarly conceived to subvert a monosexist status quo maintained through a discourse of ‘maturity.’

Bitextuality

Eisner (2013) claims that by “marking a resistance to binaries, a collapse of boundaries, and a subversion of order”, her methodology in *Bi: Notes for a bisexual revolution* is itself somewhat “bisexual in character” (p.43). I embrace the ‘bisexual character’ of Eisner’s text, and similarly envision bisexuality as an approach to textuality and critical practice, as well as a subject position. It is not necessarily that her text itself resists binaries, collapses boundaries or subverts order that makes it ‘bisexual’, but that it *marks* those things. Similarly, for Jo Eadie (1999) the bisexual figure in film functions as “a marker, whose bisexuality signals that there is something – or rather, something else – of interest about them” (p.142). They become a necessary figure that “holds together meanings of greed, instability and consumption” (p.200). Bisexuality here is not therefore inherently subversive, but functions as an index of subversion.

In this sense, bisexuality is seen to be relational. Ann Kaloski observes that “the figure of ‘the bisexual’” is seen to “*connect* disparate strands of feminism, capitalism, psychoanalysis, colonialism, literature and art, amongst other things” (Bi Academic Intervention, 1997, p.200). Relatedly, Clare Hemmings suggests “connection to other identities” is a characteristic that “typifies bisexual theorizing” (Bi Academic Intervention, 1997, p.210). In both ‘the bisexual’ as (often problematically) represented figure, and in the tradition of the bi theoretical constructions that Hemmings identifies, we see connection to other positions as a key dynamic. Any identic or discursive position is necessarily relational – bisexuality does not have a monopoly on connectedness. Nevertheless, as an identity and theoretical position which may be seen to ‘connect’ different sides of an apparent

hetero/homo binary (even as it marks the very point of their division), such relationality might be one key characteristic of bitextual engagement.

The approaches of Eadie, Hemmings and Kaloski above, along with those of other members of Bi Academic Intervention, represent a particular moment in the development of bi-theory in the mid/late 1990's which can provide a useful critical context for the bisexual representations appearing in *The Buddha of Suburbia* just a few years earlier. More recently, but echoing those approaches in some key ways, Maria San Filippo (2013) uses "bi-textuality" to stand for a narrative structure with a "double plot" which "works through bisexuality by analogizing it to other 'deviant' identity constructions that also resist the terms imposed by binary thinking" (p.6). She suggests that these "attempts to work through bisexuality . . . by reading it through another discourse . . . expose the fallacy of ordering sexuality (or any identity construct) so simplistically and constrictively as binary systems do" (p.41). For Filippo then, a bisexual engagement with textuality is identified through connection and analogy to other positions, as well as in a dual narrative structure, to expose the limits of binary thinking.

Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (1995) developed her own theory of "bitextuality" in reference to illustrated books of the *fin-de-Siècle* to account for the "image/text/reader dialogue" (p.247), and explore how "meaning is actively produced in the intercourse between picture and word" (p.11). Kooistra's bitextual studies therefore "incorporate the strategies of both visual and verbal interpretation in order to understand how the dialogue between picture and word produces meaning within a network of cultural discourses" (p.5). "Bitextual construction of meaning," for Kooistra, "never results in a seamless oneness, but is always the process of a negotiated relation between the forces that make the picture and word cohere and the forces that drive them apart" (p.13). In this version of bitextuality then, it is in the

intercourse between different visual/textual forms that meaning is both produced and problematized, within a broader discursive network.

For Robert Samuels (1998) “bi-textuality” describes a “polyvalent foundation of sexuality and textuality” (p.135). He suggests that that “the combination of . . . opposing modes of discourse creates a bi-textual form of sexuality and representation” (p.26) whereby “bisexuality and bi-textuality serve to undermine all of our stable illusions of identity and our ability to control language as well as the general field of representation” (p.5). For Samuels then, it is particularly the oppositions between different forms of discourse which destabilise identity and language and mark bisexual textuality.

These formations are all useful; this article’s bitextuality is informed by each to prioritize metaphorical connections between bisexuality and other identities, foreground interactions and oppositions across the visual and verbal, interrogate normative narrative structures and point to a critical relation between conceptions of bisexuality and an erotics of reading which negotiates different textual forms. This article’s bitextuality moves between text, image, music, identity, to explore negotiations of those moments in literary and cultural narratives in which coherence and division are in dynamic relation.

More specifically, textual immaturity focuses on adolescence as a particular discursive position to which bisexuality is analogised. Taking a cue from the cry of the adolescent, in textual immaturity *everything is so out of order*. Pointing to different ways this might mean (broken, unreasonable, non-linear, uncontrollable, mixed-up) and to forms of ‘disorder’ (civil disobedience, or the historical characterisation of non-normative sexualities), and noting Eisner’s (2013) claim that “bisexuality as an idea is something that society finds threatening to its normal order” (p.42), the article speaks to a textual and sexual dissidence through which bi-theory might respond to monosexism ‘immaturely.’

Adolescence

Adolescence is definitionally ‘in-between’. Alison Waller (2010) notes that it is perceived as “in transition, and in constant growth towards the ultimate goal of maturity” (p.1) but is “located, not merely as ‘other’ to adulthood, but also as ‘other’ to childhood” (p.6). Patrick Heaven (2001) also describes adolescence as a “time of transition” and notes that “adolescents do not clearly fit into any life stage” (p.xiii). Thus it is regularly linked with a bisexuality similarly cast ‘in-between’ hetero- and homosexualities in a monosexual binary it does not fit. The similar positioning of bisexuality as transitory, *en route* to a fixed monosexuality, results, I argue, from a broader investment in teleological narratives of maturation and progress. Judith Roof (1996) suggests that the concepts of narrative and sexuality are “interwound with one another . . . within the reproductive and/or productive, metaphorically heterosexual ideology that also underwrites the naturalised understanding of the shape and meaning of life” (p.xxvii). Roof argues that a “heteroideology” therefore subtends narrative as such and is determined by the structuring force of a narrative end: “reflecting finally a belief that meaning can be had at all, the fact of an end appears to give us a sense of mastery over what we can identify as a complete unit” (p.8). A bitextual focus on transition, connectedness and relation however, can question the conception of the “complete unit”, of meaning, and of end-oriented narrativity.

This “fact of an end”, whilst structuring all narrative, is explicitly fundamental to developmental narratives where it takes the name, ‘maturity.’ In literary terms we can consider this through the *Bildungsroman*. Franco Moretti (2000) notes that in the classical *Bildungsroman*, “narrative transformations have meaning in so far as they lead to a particularly marked ending” (p.7). Since “youth must come to an end” it is “subordinated to the idea of ‘Maturity.’” Youth then, like the narrative itself, “has meaning only *in so far as* it leads to a stable and ‘final’ identity” (p.8), and it is precisely in its finality and stability that this identity can be recognised as ‘mature.’ The genre enacts “the valorization of the existing

order” (p.68), by making finality/fixity itself a marker of maturity, and thereby reinforces a linear narrativity which cannot accommodate a supposedly transitional bisexuality as a legitimate endpoint.

Maturity functioning as norm is also visible in James Côté’s (2000) formulation of a “‘mature’ manner” being one “corresponding to the type of responsible, self-determining individualism that constitutes the basis of the contemporary liberal democracies” (p.57). Something is ‘mature’ here to the extent that it conforms to behaviors, expectations or priorities underpinning a status quo. Relatedly, “in psychological tradition” a key product of “maturity” is “desistance from antisocial behavior” supposedly characterising adolescence (Monahan et al, 2013, p.1093). But in a heteronormative culture which commits violence against queer subjects daily, our responses might well be considered ‘anti-social’ where our project is precisely a refusal of a social which excludes us.

Maturity also carries numerous figurative meanings. If to be ‘mature’ is to be “proper, fitting, appropriate (in time)” then textual immaturity prioritizes the improper, the ill-fitting, the temporally inappropriate: between times; in the wrong time; out of time; untimely. If maturity is that which “has attained an advanced and settled state” then textual immaturity will prioritize texts which will not ‘settle’ (OED). With multiple forms folding back into each other *The Buddha of Suburbia* is an exemplary text. Since the name refers to: a novel; a television adaptation; a nickname for a character in both; an album based on the soundtrack; a song (appearing in two versions) on that album; it troubles discrete identification. Unsettled and unsettling; a bitextual assemblage of interrelated texts.

Working against a monosexist culture involves working against its narrative forms. Jed Esty (2012) notes the *Bildungsroman* is “a conventionally linear narrative of cultural adjustment” (p.213). He suggests that whilst modernist reworkings of the form through “wayward story lines and extended adolescence” could “cast doubt on the ideology of

progress” itself, nevertheless “both the coming-of-age novel *and* its developmental imperatives persist” in contemporary culture (p.196). Through a reading of *The Buddha of Suburbia* as a contemporary bisexual ‘coming-of-age’ assemblage, this article examines immaturity in both adolescent and adult characters to explore how the texts’ own waywardness, and the non-linear intercourse between novel, adaptation and album, might continue the task of critiquing developmental imperatives. These imperatives have been examined in recent queer theory by scholars such as Elizabeth Freeman (2010), who notes the normativizing functions of “teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childbearing, and death” (p.4). The literary and social narratives through which, Jack Halberstam (2005) suggests “we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation” (p.4) also, I argue, contribute to (or rely on) bisexual erasure.

Hemmings notes that in “narratives of sexual identity generally we tend to find retrospective rewriting of past experiences to make sense of one’s whole life as leading to, and as proof of, what one is now” (Bi Academic Intervention, 1997, p.209). A narrative progression tending toward an ever more ‘authentic’ self has the effect of invalidating previous experiences/identities. Thus earlier bisexualities are rewritten as immature confusion/experimentation to secure a coherent monosexual identity. This mirrors the broader cultural positioning of bisexuality, identified by Jenée Wilde (2014), as a “precursor to recognising one’s ‘true’ sexual identity as lesbian, gay, or straight” (p.323). In this model, a person’s ‘authentic’ identity is who they are ‘now’ (and therefore always ‘really’ were) rather than who they have been or could be. In this system of what I term *final salary identities* bisexuality is invalidated and recast as ‘really’ monosexual.

But, as a supposedly transitory identity bisexuality can work against final salary identity schemes and the developmental imperatives they reify. Hemmings has suggested that “a bisexual perspective can afford to focus on – is in fact dependent upon – those very rifts which other identities may gain more from avoiding” (Bi Academic Intervention, 1997, p.209). This alternative bi-narrative could accept ‘authentic’ bisexual moments alongside ‘authentic’ straight, lesbian, gay or differently-conceived moments, within one body: a network of difference in which equally in/authentic selves co-exist in rejection of final salary logic. By focusing on such rifts we can attempt to put into practice Roof’s (2006) insight that combating heteroideology will require

seeing what has always been there: the patterns in narrative that have never counted because they did not lead to closure. . . . Never assuming that effect necessarily precedes cause . . . understanding that time can move two ways, and that meaning lies not in the lure of knowledge but in the repetitions, accruals, alternations, and nonsense of maybe never getting there. Or in knowing there is no there to get. (p.187)

Textual immaturity revels in such nonsense. It reads for the ways in which texts are not fitting. It plays with cultural pressures toward maturity and seeks sites of non-conformity with end-orientation. Textual immaturity might want to grow up, but *not like that*. Its texts are unruly, un-ruleable, unreliable.

Bruce Carson (2000) credits Kureishi with the “ability to range across a range of ‘high’ and ‘popular’ cultural forms” (p.114). I similarly examine the interaction between form and cultural hierarchy, particularly through the texts’ articulations of pop music. This is informed by Jack Halberstam’s (2011) ‘Low theory.’ To “look for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations,” Halberstam “darts back and forth between high and low culture, high and low theory, popular culture and esoteric knowledge, in order to push through the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing”

(p.2). Exploring how the “low” can refigure “serious” academic contexts, Halberstam reminds us that “being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production” (p.6). I embrace this notion of frivolity as a strategy against binary thinking. Bi-theory is a good site for this: bisexuality is often not seen as a ‘serious’ identity, associated with an “apolitical frivolity” (Filippo, 2013, p.54) and often becomes visible primarily through the ‘frivolous’ domain of pop culture. But the frivolous need not be apolitical.² By taking the silly seriously, and making the serious silly, the very immaturity of bisexuality as figured under monosexism, might engender alternative reading and writing pleasures.

Kureishi suggests that part of writing’s responsibility “is its irresponsibility,” its “asking questions of authority” and not being “respectful to ideologies” (MacCabe, 1999, p.53). A critical immaturity might then focus on this ‘irresponsible’ relation to authority. Heaven (1994) refers to teenagers’ “orientation to authority”, which “given a capability for abstract reasoning, leaves them more likely to question authority” than younger children (p.194). It is pleasing he chooses a word with such connection to dissident sexualities as ‘orientation,’ linking responses to authority with desire so ‘Adolescence’ becomes a site of a exploration of sexuality and critical thought. Textual immaturity recognises an implicate sexual and critical orientation: a queerness, in which a desire to question authority merges with the questioning of authority *as* desire.

The in/ability of adolescents to ‘reason’ was key in UK debates during the 1990s around lowering the age of consent for consensual homosexual acts between males. Having been set at twenty-one when the Sexual Offences Act 1967 partially decriminalised male homosexuality, the 1990s saw high-profile campaigns to equalise this with the heterosexual age of sixteen, coinciding with the publication of the novel and particularly the television

broadcast. The political discourse primarily concerned ‘homosexual’ sex and the arguments against equalisation often reflected an investment in a fixed monosexuality. During the House of Commons debate three months after *The Buddha of Suburbia* aired, MPs expressed concern for those “whose sexual orientation is not properly determined,” “is open to alteration and redirection”, and “who are bobbing about in an uncertain sea of sexual development.” The concern was apparently not “with those whose sexual orientation is crystallised and fully formed,” but “precisely with the ‘in between’ group” who “have not finally made up their minds exactly what they are or how they are” (*Hansard*, 21 February 1994 col 101-4). That is, those understood not as bisexual, but as not yet gay or straight. The resulting vote rejected sixteen but lowered the age to eighteen. This relied upon a commitment to the kind of developmental narrative which delegitimizes bisexuality: if it were recognised as an acceptable ‘mature’ position, it would have more clearly demonstrated the nonsense of unequal ages of consent, when for instance, bisexual males could have female partners at/of sixteen, but male partners only at/of eighteen and above.

The arguments against equalisation also relied on the perceived inability of sixteen-eighteen year-olds to make a reasoned decision to have “gay sex” with a full understanding of the “consequence” that they might lose “the option of family life and normal parenthood” (*Hansard*, 21 February 1994 col 104). However, Cauffman and Steinberg (2000) note that a lack of “strong evidence of cognitive differences between adolescents and adults” to “account for developmental differences in decision-making” has led to suggestions “that adolescents and adults employ the same logical processes when making decisions, but differ in the sorts of information they use and the priorities they hold” (p.744). If adolescent logic performs the same processes as adults’ (rather than ‘underdeveloped’ versions), then any difference in outlook is not a question of superiority but of priority. Textual immaturity is therefore a set of priorities, emerging from characteristics in the discourse of adolescence which overlap

with bisexuality, which question the supposedly ‘reasoned’ and ‘logical’ priorities of monosexual ‘maturity.’

If adolescent orientation to authority is primarily one towards questioning it, it is nevertheless unpredictably so. There is an illogic to this orientation which keeps it always uncertain. Sara Ahmed’s (2006) discussion of ‘orientation’ in *Queer Phenomenology* has a striking moment of absent bisexuality at the very point she explains how she came to her subject: “In the middle of my life I experienced a dramatic redirection I left the ‘world’ of heterosexuality and became a lesbian” (p.19). That her exploration of sexual orientation as directional develops from a specific moment of unnamed bisexuality suggests a discursive connection between bisexuality and the act of turning, or reorienting, which points towards this same unpredictability.

Pamela Thurschwell (2014) has described adolescence as a cultural “locus for concerns about . . . waywardness, or deviance” (p.167). This is related to the conception of bisexuality as “a point of departure, rather than a destination point of a resolved, conscious and integrated adult sexuality” (Davidson, 1997, p.71). I want to think bisexuality as a “point of departure” less in the sense of origin, but as a turning and a turning away; an orientation toward disorientation. Samuels (1998) has posited “the dis-orienting aspects of bi-textual desire,” suggesting that “multiple forms of sexuality and textuality upset the clear binary logic of sexual difference” (p.136). How might the disoriented adolescent figure’s unpredictable response to authority point us towards a disoriented and disorienting reading?

The Buddha of Suburbia

A key moment early in the novel situates this disorientation as a temporal one. Seventeen year-old narrator, Karim, “excited and dizzy” (Kureishi, 1999, p.14) has “an extraordinary revelation”:

I could see my life clearly for the first time: the future and what I wanted to do. I wanted to live always this intensely: mysticism, alcohol, sexual promise, clever people and drugs. . . . The door to the future had opened: I could see which way to go. (p.15)

The way to go however is not so much a spatial direction as a temporal one: “I had glimpsed a world of excitement and possibility which I wanted to hold in my mind and expand as a template for the future” (p.19). The future that he desires is an eternal extension of this particular present. This present-oriented temporality reflects adolescence – stuck between an adult future and past childhood (even as those positions come to figure conversely: the adult as society’s past; the child as its future). As this realisation dawns, Karim begins to enact the extension of this present into the future, by rejecting one of maturity’s key markers: “I’ll never be getting married, OK?” he says to his mother, on returning home (p.18). By expressly refusing this traditional endpoint, Karim’s statement marks commitment to an alternative narrativity.

The text does not however simply locate immaturity in its young characters. Eva (the woman for whom Karim’s father Haroon leaves his wife) provides a particularly striking example of immature adulthood. At the start of the novel, she is “the only person over thirty [Karim] could talk to” (p.10). The barrier between the adolescent and the normative adult is one of language –of a failure to facilitate an adolescent articulation. Eva can break this barrier, since her relationship to maturity is temporally unfixed, and related to feeling rather than age:

Her face was constantly in motion. . . . Sometimes she became childlike and you could see her at eight or seventeen or twenty-five. The different ages of her life seemed to exist simultaneously, as if she could move from age to age according to how she felt. There was no cold maturity about her, thank Christ. (p.86)

Communication becomes possible between the adult and the adolescent only when the adult position is open to its own immaturity. Karim's reading of Eva points to a model of adult immaturity as an engaging, productive, positive means of connection, relation, intercourse. This immaturity is marked by transition and by an unfixing of age and maturity markers. Note how "childlike" applies equally to twenty-five as it does to eight or seventeen. Just as the adolescent is both/neither child and/nor adult, so Eva's ability to be recognised in the present as at any point in her past models the bisexual narrativity outlined above, in which the experiences and identity positions of different life stages are held to be equally valid within a non-linear refusal of final salary logic.

This temporality also emerges when reading the novel alongside the adaptation. Any adaptation inevitably troubles temporality since 'later' texts impact upon the 'original,' retroactively. Julie Sanders (2006) suggests that therefore we should think adaptations "in terms of webs or networks of allusion and (mutual) influence" (p.152). These non-linear networks allow us to consider ways in which "adaptations have a way of upending sacrosanct elements like priority and originality" (Hutcheon, 2006, p.122). The temporal relation between these texts is therefore bi-directional, but as Carson (2000) argues, "the majority of critical readings have privileged the novel and overlooked the importance" of the adaptation "in shaping the audience's cultural memory of the text" (p.113). That the adaptation "played a dominant role in shaping the audience memory" of the text (p.118) is particularly likely given publicity in the *Daily Mail*, claiming it featured "some of the most graphic sex scenes ever screened on British television" and was "branded by MPs as being 'television out of control and totally out of order'" (Middlehurst, 1993, p.12). It is important to consider these bitextually therefore, as texts which are always in a relation of mutual influence, and therefore *out of order* in multiple ways.

That the texts' meanings alter when read in relation is shown by their treatments of another adult immaturity: Haroon's petulance. Having caught his son masturbating Eva's son Charlie, Haroon confronts Karim; Karim reveals that he witnessed Haroon's adultery with Eva. In the novel, this leads to "the Great Sulk" (Kureishi, 1999, p.20), in which for a week "Dad sulked and didn't speak" (p.19), so that when Eva telephones and Haroon answers (with Eva again being the only 'adult' that the 'adolescent' can talk to) it is "as if unaccustomed to using his voice". The only other moment in which Haroon's period of silence is broken is "the queer sound [Karim] heard coming from his room". Rehearsing his supposed expertise in Indian spiritual traditions for audiences of white suburbanites, Haroon is "hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent. He's spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads" (p.21). As, Berthold Schoene (1998) explains, Haroon "prosperes on what he can retrieve of his Indian past, conflating it with Eva and her friends' spurious conception of Indianness". In Schoene's reading, "Kureishi deconstructs common conceptions concerning the authenticity of individual and group identities, demonstrating that no clear differentiating line can be drawn between being and acting" (p.116). This deconstruction of authentic identity through the elaborate re/construction of a (false) authenticity is marked in the novel, by 'queer' sounds, punctuating an adult's petulant silence.

But something happens to the novel's silence when adapted for TV. The family still dine with Haroon without talking and react awkwardly when the phone rings but the effect is altered, since it does not occur within a specific period of deliberate silence. Without representation of "the Great Sulk" as an active, stubborn silence, what was a specifically awkward dinner in the novel becomes a generically awkward one in the series as a specific *act* of silence is replaced by a pervasive *state* of silence. Haroon's queer sounds shift from

specific punctuation in an active past silence to a standard oscillation in a passive, pervasively present one.

Read together, these interrogations of queerness and identic authenticity through differently silent immaturities embody a temporal tension similar to that which constitutes adolescence. Thurschwell (2014) notes “two opposing understandings of temporality” that characterize modern adolescence: adolescence “as a passing phase, a few brief moments in time on the trajectory from childhood to adulthood” versus “the adolescent . . . as an identity” (p.167). I suggest the “tension between adolescence as phase and adolescence as identity” Thurschwell identifies (p.168), also mirrors a dynamic in bi-theory between identity-based and epistemological approaches: one requiring a politically viable position from/about which to speak; one a radically unfixable conceptualization of bisexuality. As Merl Storr (1999) notes “the reification of bisexuality as an identity is incompatible with the allegedly transformative potential of bisexuality as an epistemological force” (p.167), and much bi-theory from the 1990s onward has been characterised by this tension. Haroon’s silences therefore play out the temporal dynamics of both adolescence and bisexuality in the space between novel and television.

In these texts, pop music and bisexuality are also implicate, and further complicate development. Kureishi has suggested that Karim’s bisexuality was to show that

one emerges out of childhood bisexual . . . you feel so erotically attached to both men and women It’s only later that . . . I got differentiated out and knew what it was that I really wanted. Bowie and pop were a big influence. . . . And you know, dressing up and being girlish was part of English pop. . . . So it did seem to me that being a girl was part of being a boy in some way. And I was rather surprised when it was called bisexuality. (MacCabe, 1999, p.48)

In this fittingly ambiguous elaboration, Kureishi describes a universal bisexual orientation (erotic attachment to men and women) out of which a bi-sexual subject (both ‘boy’ and ‘girl’) is differentiated in adulthood, into what they “really” wanted. But this is recognised as erroneously universal, contingent and influenced by “Bowie and pop”. Kureishi slips between bisexuality as both a universal psychological and physiological ambiguity, and a pop performance.

This interview response is not a theorized articulation of bisexuality but it does enact ambiguities present in the term. Storr (1999) sets out definitions which have historically been attached to bisexuality: that it consists “in maleness and femaleness, in a biological or anatomical sense,” “in masculinity and femininity, in the psychological sense” and then “in heterosexuality and homosexuality” (p.3). As Eisner (2013) notes, all of these definitions “(including the medical ones) are still used in some form” (p.20). That Kureishi imbricates these different meanings with popular music is fitting, since pop is one of the places bisexuality as orientation becomes visible precisely through bisexuality as androgyny and gender play in the performances of artists such as Bowie.

Karim’s bisexuality is similarly articulated through pop: “It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as well as girls. . . . I felt it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones” (Kureishi, 1999, p.55). Hemmings (1997) has suggested that bisexual individuals “are constituted by their sense of being made up from their experiences in other places, which are radically incompatible, but between which we cannot choose” (p.208). Whilst Hemmings could appear to simply reinforce another stereotype of bisexuality here – as ‘indecisive’ – Karim’s Beatles/Stones sexuality is instructive as it demonstrates that the problem lies not in the subject who is unable to choose, but with the falseness of the choice they are presented with.

That it is *those* two bands framing bisexuality is key, since as John McMillian (2013) observes, they “represent two sides of one of the twentieth century’s greatest aesthetic debates” (p.4). “Teens on both sides of the Atlantic defined themselves by whether they preferred the Beatles or the Stones” (p.2) and a “preference for one group over the other is [still] thought to reveal something substantial about one’s personality” (p.4). Karim understands that making this choice/identificatory statement would break his bisexual heart. This pressure to choose is fundamental to the maturity against which bisexuality is cast, as Garber (1995) notes: “The claim that bisexuality is ‘immature’ is closely related to this assumption that maturity means choosing between those ostensibly polar alternatives” of heterosexuality and homosexuality (p.343). As in the age of consent debate, ‘maturity’ comes to mean not just choosing, but the ability to choose according to a particular monosexual logic. Of course, as with sexual orientation the apparently meaningful divide between the bands is a false one, for “when rational criticism prevails, *both* groups are lauded” (McMillian, 2013, p.5). The choice is not heartbreaking because the subject is inherently indecisive, but because they are being forced into a choice with impossible terms.

Aligning sex-object choice with a choice between Beatles/Stones may appear to trivialise bisexuality by reading it through the lens of pop. I would suggest, conversely, that it calls for pop to be taken seriously by reading it through the lens of sexuality. When the novel was published there was, Kureishi claims, “some condescension; it wasn’t thought to be a proper literary novel” (O’Connell, 2008), in part because of its pop content. Kureishi has claimed a fascination with “writing about pop” and “introducing subjects into writing, into literature, that hadn’t been there before” (MacCabe, 1999, p.47). He describes a provocation from Salman Rushdie:

“We take you seriously as a writer, Hanif”, he said, “but you only write screenplays.”

And I remember being really hurt by this, and provoked by it. And I thought, well,

I'll write a novel then, and then I'll be a proper writer; that somehow that's what being a proper writer was. (MacCabe, 1999, p.42)

It is telling that, in positioning the novel as “proper” writing, Kureishi’s response was to engage with the *Bildungsroman*’s notions of proper maturation. In a satisfying inversion of the narrative of cultural maturity invoked here, *Buddha* begins as a novel and ‘regresses.’ If the novel partly responds to the provocation that Kureishi *only* wrote screenplays, then even before the adaptation it carried the spectre of the screenplay it was determining not to be. Bowie’s album then completes the circle, returning the text to the pop which inspired it.

Despite being distributed as such the album is not the transmitted TV soundtrack. Instead, those “motif driven small pieces . . . just took on a life of their own in the studio, with lots of narrative provocation from Hanif’s play.” Revisiting his 1970’s working methods, Bowie re-employed the “cut-up style” from “the Brion Gyson/William Burroughs school of Fucking with the Fabric of Time” (Bowie, 2007). The resultant text has an ambiguous relationship to narrative. Bowie claimed when making *Buddha* that “the narrative form is almost redundant” but he was nevertheless “loading in great dollops of pastiche and quasi-narrative” into it (Pegg, 2011, p.384). After taking “narrative provocation” from Kureishi, and marrying it with an anti-narrative sensibility and techniques from his own earlier work, Bowie the 1990s collagist creates the incidental soundtrack to a fictional 1970s which he had initially inspired; this fictional 1970s then inspires his own new cut-up creativity in the 1990s.³ On the title track (the series’ theme) Bowie (2007) aligns the text with the ‘proper’ literary *Bildungsroman*, even as he fucks with the temporal fabric of its narrativity and refuses development: “With Great Expectations I changed all my clothes / mustn’t grumble at silver and gold / Screaming above Central London /never bored so I’ll never get old”. The proper course of the Dickensian *Bildungsroman* is aborted by a

commitment to the kind of dizzy excitement Karim identified as the template for his (expanded present) future.

This is a cut-up crystallisation of a dynamic already present in the other texts' structures. Susan Brook (2005) suggests that "the narrative of escape from the suburb to the city is written into the novel's *Bildungsroman* structure" (p.216) but "over the course of the novel, this distinction is often contradicted, modified or rendered unstable," since "the differences between the inner city and the suburb are increasingly unclear." Although the novel is divided into sections (Part One: In the Suburbs / Part Two: In the City), the suburb, for Brook, "emerges as a space of in-betweenness" and crucially, "forms a point of return as well of departure for the novel, disrupting a simple linear structure" (p.221). I suggest that read alongside the adaptation this structure aligns with a bitextual temporality. In an added scene toward the end of Episode Two which marks the move from suburb to city, Eva announces: "We're off – to the future, to London" (Michell, 2007). London: a spatialized future of possibility. But if London is a future-space, then not only are subsequent returns to Beckenham returns to suburban roots, but also more directly to the space of the past. The future into which the protagonists 'mature' is an unfixated future from which one can return. Given Thurschwell's (2014) suggestion that "adolescence might be the developmental stage that just says no to development" (p.170), we can read this structure as textually immature. To the extent that this is a *Bildungsroman* it is not (only) Karim's but Haroon's too. "We're growing up together, we are," Haroon tells his son (Kureishi, 1999, p.22). As this commitment to "growing up" might indicate, by the end of the text Haroon has re-embraced a normative life narrative, even co-opting Eva into its script. "There's an announcement I must make," Eva says – but finds herself incapable of articulating it, her role as communicator between adult/adolescent curtailed. Haroon steps in with a comically brief articulation which parodies a normative romance plot: "We met, fell in love, and now we're getting married"

(p.283). Haroon reasserts a ‘mature’ narrativity over an immature questioning. Karim’s development however remains unresolved at the end, but looks outward, conflicted and relational: “And so I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of the tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time.” Noting his ambivalent position in relation both to people and to spaces, Karim has managed to “locate himself” but his future remains open (p.284). In juxtaposing these two endings the text demonstrates both the power and the perniciousness of the developmental narrative, by showing a re/acceptance of it to have intervened in Eva’s ability to communicate immaturely as she once did, but gives Karim’s more open, relational, immature future to undercut it.

Through this initial reading of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, this article points to ways in which these texts, and their interrelations, can be seen to stage some of the dynamics through which contemporary bisexualities are produced in discursive relation to other positions such as adolescence. In so doing, it builds on of earlier conceptions of bitextuality and links them to moves in bi-theory to re-examine and repurpose negative stereotypes. Similar moves might also be performed with other bisexual stereotypes (such as greedy, promiscuous, uncertain), but in this particular case, critical attention to bisexuality as ‘the very sign of immaturity’ examines ways in which social, legal and literary conceptions of maturity are implicate with the commitment to an end-oriented narrativity and final salary logic which, I have argued, also structures monosexism and bi erasure.

This provides a crucial lens through in which to re-view literary and cultural texts, and, by focusing on their particular forms of relationality and temporality, to interrogate the means by which social and literary narratives of development can come to reinforce a heteronormative, monosexist, social order. Textual immaturity therefore presents one way in which creative and critical textual practices might resist monosexism, by focusing less on improving

bisexual representation (though that is still important), but rather on the ways in which certain forms of representation might be seen to be already ‘bisexual,’ or rather, bitextual.

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