

'No longer young and not yet old' London: spatio-temporal ambivalence in Hanif Kureishi's *Something to tell you*

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Abstract

This article examines the peculiar spatio-temporal ambivalence of Hanif Kureishi's 2008 novel, *Something to Tell You*. Building on Doreen Massey's (2005) understanding of *space* and *place*, I put forth a new framework of spatial production and experience, comprising the cartographical and the phenomenological. Through these terms, I argue that we can engage with both the particularity and the plurality of the novel's representation of London. Geographic Information System (GIS) software is employed both to make explicit the novel's relationship to cartography, and to cartographic London, but, equally, to conceptualise *Something to Tell You's* reconstellation of the city. By way of conclusion, I suggest that *Something to Tell You* bears a political and poetic ambivalence that is symptomatic of a wider hesitancy toward representing the capital (as representation relates to stultification). And whilst this unsettledness and non-surety as to the 'where' and the 'when' of London experience is, for protagonist, Jamal, a cause of great anxiety, is it nonetheless true to the 'reality', in Wolfreys' (1999) sense of the term, of living, of doing, and of being in London.

Keywords: Hanif Kureishi, London, Doreen Massey, Cartography, Social

Geography, Contemporary Literature, *Something to Tell You*, British Asian Fiction

In 2014, author China Miéville said in conversation with Lars Schmeink, '[I]f you live in London, it isn't that you get on with the business of living and the backdrop happens to be this place called London. It is that you are living in London. Living in London is a thing' (Miéville in Schmeink, 2014). Miéville leaves the particular nature of that 'thing' purposefully opaque and expresses an ambivalence toward the city that corresponds with the literary ambivalence expressed in works by a number of London writers—from Charles Dickens to Samuel Johnson and, later, from Peter Ackroyd to Martin Amis. As Julian Wolfreys persuasively argues in the first book of his multi-volume work, *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens* (1999), London novels tell us that the city 'is diverse, rich and strange, estranging and alien; real and yet hyperreal, babbling and yet ineffable, apocalyptic and yet also banal, quotidian *and* exotic at one and the same time' (Wolfreys, 1999: 12). Stretching the scope of Wolfreys's critical insight past the modern period and toward contemporary literature, I argue that this tentativeness shown toward writing or even thinking about London is not without meaning; rather, this ambivalence and the paradoxes borne out of such ambivalence is, in fact, characteristic of both the experience of writing about, and living in, the city. More than that, in contemporary society and in a London which is constantly reinventing—or displacing—itsself, it reflects the multiple belongings available in the city and, furthermore, the many intersecting discourses with which those discernibly temporary belongings are achieved.

As an author who regularly 'tackles uncomfortable topics and the messiness of human interactions *without absolutist answers*' (Fischer, 2015: 2; emphasis added), and

whose work has been defined by 'its very refusal to say what it should say' (Ahmed, 2009: 29), Hanif Kureishi has, in this vein, avoided presenting a depiction of London that would render it complete and thus totemic throughout his literary career. Born in Bromley, South London to a Pakistani father and English mother, Kureishi has become something of a figurehead for the emergence of British Asian fiction in the 1980s. His early screenplays and novels, in particular, continue to be met with critical acclaim for their emphasis on the contradictions both of second generation migrancy and the very thing, to recall Miéville's words, that is living in London.

In light of the hugely successful publication of Kureishi's first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (2000 [1990]), this hesitancy toward capturing a full picture of the capital has continued to be critically understood as a strategic, postcolonial move and one which is ultimately geared toward bringing attention to (and potentially renegotiating) the politics of migrancy (see Ball, 1996; Kelata, 2010 [1998]; Sen, 2000; Upstone, 2010; Romanow, 2011). While that description might correspond with his first novel, however—a novel which, without doubt, presents a radically inventive counter-discourse to challenge those who see British Asian identity condensed into just one realisation—his later work has proven difficult to read in the same way. *Something to Tell You* (2008) has not only led reviewers to hastily remark on its author's flagrant disregard for postcolonial identity politics (see Wagner, 2008; Tonkin, 2008) but has also attracted critics to chastise Kureishi's not only unimaginative but problematically conventional depiction of London (see Upstone, 2010; Wagner, 2008; Tonkin, 2008; Fischer, 2015). Where the protagonist of his earlier work negotiates the

prospects and limitations of his dual heritage and succeeds in establishing a 'new breed' (Kureishi, 2000: 1) of Englishness formed by both 'British-ness' and 'Asian-ness', and neither, *Something to Tell You* has been said to side-line questions about British Asian identity altogether. Whilst the novel is admittedly far removed from the self-consciously postcolonial agenda observed in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the more foreboding *The Black Album* (1995) and a great number of Kureishi's screenplays, this article aims to highlight the ways in which his 2008 novel remains committed to a politics and a poetics of ambivalence – if only because they are employed in the service of another, equally overdetermined symbol: London.

The trance of the English capital and, in particular, the propensity to narrativise its form has been highlighted by a great many authors, including Ian Jack who writes in his 'Introduction' to Granta's *London: The Lives of the City*: 'people who come to London also bring it with them in their minds. They have a feeling of how the city should be before they meet it' (Jack, 1999: 6). Writing just less than ten years later, Gail Cunningham expresses much the same; for her, 'London occupies a unique position in England's—and probably the Anglophone world's imagination' (Cunningham, 2007: xi). The compulsion to imagine or narrativise the metropolis is not new, and the particular deconstructive effects of London's narrative history will be discussed later. However, such a propensity becomes inherently political when one considers the sheer social plurality by which the capital is now characterised, as well as the nature and implications of the most salient discourses – the coinage of multiculturalism being but one example (see Modood, 1997; Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Kumar, 2003).

Speaking quantitatively: over the ten year period following the establishment of the European Union in 1993 (a decade which also saw the inclusion of further member states), Rienzo and Vargas-Silva observe that the number of foreign citizens in the UK doubled to around 7.8 million (2014: 2). In terms of migrant demographic, London outstrips other UK towns and cities by far; the capital accommodates over a third of all migrants entering Britain and has borne witness to the highest rates of migrancy for the past decade. The city now plays host to over three hundred languages, having united people from all seven continents (Kershen, 2015: 13, 18). London's undeniable heterogeneity produces 'not simply more variegated but also more provisional, constantly changing, identities' (Kumar, 2003: 242). This constant flux can be observed most clearly in the creation of creoles between second and third generation youth migrants (Kershen, 2015: 20), but it also occurs at the level of belonging more broadly and affects all inhabitants, not simply those for whom London is more recently or more contestably home.

To imagine or narrativise London, if we understand narrative as a mode of historiography, is to 'overwrite a past onto what has always been a city in the act of becoming' (Wolfreys, 1999: 7); it is to give a kind of form to the city, both socially and geographically. It is the interconnection between those trajectories, the social and the geographical, with which spatial scholarship is ultimately concerned. Following the influential work of spatial scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, the likes of which include J. B. Harley, Michel de Certeau and Edward Soja, Doreen Massey suggests '[p]lace...is the locus of denial, of attempted withdrawal from invasion/difference' (2005: 5-6).

This echoes McKerrow, providing we understand his 'space' to, in fact, refer to 'place' (as he no doubt would have intended with retrospect, and indeed which he seems to advocate here). Thus with a simple replacement, 'place' would be 'that enclosure [...] in which actions of one kind, but not of others, can occur' (1999: 272). Massey employs a vocabulary of *space* and *place* throughout her work (which I henceforth adopt)—the former as a model of plurality, contingency and continuity, and the latter as 'a tabular conceptualisation of space' (Massey, 2005: 68), i.e. a reductionist view of space as a vessel or, in socio-political terms, a territory. In turn, an ontology of place introduces an element of fixity—a quality that has been consistently problematised by postcolonial and spatial scholars alike, including Soja who argues that such a concretisation 'rationalize[s] existing conditions and thereby serve[s] to promote repetitive behaviour, the continuous reproduction of practices' (Soja, 1989: 14). Space is presented as the very condition of being; we are always occupying one place or another, or making the journey between places, hence intimating the possibility of space. Correspondingly, this fixity of space (and, hence production of place) in which narrative is imbricated imposes limits by which a body can be recognised. To undermine *place* and, specifically, London's reality as a *place*, is therefore to interrogate the very location (geographically and symbolically) at which identity is both formed and sustained.

Drawing together those ideas from contemporary spatial theory whilst leaving aside the postcolonial and migrant-inflected tracts which have somewhat unhelpfully dominated critiques of Kureishi's work, *Something to Tell You* (2008) is, here, submitted

as a novel which is not only intimately related to its central location, London, but which explores London as a *space* of contradiction and *displacement* and which is thus fundamentally plural. Presenting a vernacularised reading of the city's topography which both reveals and invests in its constant and subjective production, Kureishi foregrounds the endless negotiation between space and identity and, as such, undermines any sense of there being a London *par excellence* or, in other words, a London which one could successfully represent and make representative.

We meet the protagonist and narrator of *Something to Tell You*, Jamal Khan, at a crisis of middle age. Divorced from the mother of his son, Rafi, Jamal leads a relatively comfortable middle-class life, working as a psychoanalyst and, like many of the characters from Kureishi's previous novels, residing in London's leafy suburbs. As a brief aside, it should be noted that this is—at least in a symbolic sense—both London and not London, and Kureishi is well-known for writing of the borderlands, so to speak. John Clement Ball (1996) most famously discussed the author's preoccupation with the suburbs, in distinction to the city, though this perceivable tension between the two has since been picked up by a number of scholars of Kureishi's work (see Ball, 1996; Frith, 1997; Childs, 2000). Following Ball's direction and, moreover, the assumptions borne out of readings of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which is split in two by the chapters 'In the City' and 'In the Suburbs', these arguments have typically been inflected by postcolonial concerns about migration and domicile. However, to a greater extent than *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *Something to Tell You's* West

London suburbs are much more readily identifiable as representing the past, compared with the present (or potential of presence) of the inner city.

Indeed, not only does Jamal have an affinity with Freudian psychoanalysis but, somewhat uncannily, the narrator also has an unresolved past—the secrets of which threaten to interrupt his present. The novel oscillates between two temporal poles, the ‘mid-1970s’ (Kureishi, 2008: 46) and the present. These axes embody the before and after of his relationship with first love, Ajita, as well as the catalyst of her leave-taking, the moment of her father’s death. Understanding him to have died at the hand of trade unionists, Ajita fears for her safety, leaves for India and, subsequently, makes her home in New York—her departure establishing a temporally dialogic narrative form of before and after. I am borrowing this language of *before* and *after* from James Berger who, in his hugely influential book, *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse*, stresses how traumatic events operate as ‘definitive historical divides, as ruptures, pivots, fulcrums separating what came before from what came after’ (Berger, 1999: 5). *Something to Tell You* enacts this *rupture* formally, weaving a composite narrative of traumatic events via recollection and memory as well as retrospection and dialogue as it shifts from past to present. Whilst the reader learns very early on that Ajita is absent from Jamal’s present—the narrator cries out to her at the end of the second chapter, ‘Oh Ajita, if you are still alive, where are you now?’ (Kureishi, 2008: 41)—the circumstances around her departure, i.e. the suspicious death of her father, are not fully revealed until halfway through the novel. As it turns out, it was in fact Jamal and his two friends from university, Wolf and Valentin, that ultimately precipitated Ajita’s

father's death following her confession to Jamal about her father's prolonged sexual abuse. Despite only wanting to scare the man into submission, the three—Jamal brandishing a knife—cause Ajita's father to suffer a fatal heart attack during the ordeal which, as mentioned, prompts Ajita to reconsider her own safety in the city, leaving Jamal and London behind. As the mother of Jamal's son, Josephine, calls time on their relationship in a less abrupt but somewhat familiar way, memories, recollections and even faces from his past resurface with renewed vigour and he is caused to reflect on where he came from, where he is and where he will now go. A coming to terms with the present is thus marked by revisitations to the past.

We therefore find Jamal at an interstice of time which is mapped onto an interstice of space. And in a less global sense than Berger's imagining of the post-apocalypse but in a nevertheless urgent and affective way, 'the writer and the reader must be both places [sic] at once, imagining the post-apocalyptic world and then paradoxically 'remembering the world as it was, as it is' (Berger, 1999: 5–6). Thus the narrative effectively creates, and exists in, two Londons—the city as it was in the seventies and eighties, and the city as it is now. Of course, the thirty year gap between the novel's two time-frames is also one marked by rapid urban regeneration, development and enlargement. As Jamal himself reflects, 'every place is becoming London now, the city stain spreading' (Kureishi, 2008: 18). *Something to Tell You* is therefore as much about physical displacement as it is about psychological displacement. Neither of the two Londons depicted, corresponding with the mid-1970s and the present, are mere replicas of either the collective imaginaries or maps serving the

periods—despite Boyd Tonkin deploring the novel's 'lazy rehash of period clichés' and suggesting its events have a 'stagey quality' (Tonkin, 2008), and Erica Wagner offering that *Something to Tell You's* London feels 'as if its descriptions have been dragged off the Internet by someone who might never have visited the place' (Wagner, 2008). Rather, as will be underlined, topographical references made reflect the idiosyncrasies of the first-person narration and the cities are, as result, particular to Jamal's past and present experiences.

First, in order to differentiate between the London of a hegemonic, cultural imaginary—which was called to attention earlier by Jack (1999) and Cunningham (2007)—and the city as it exists individually for inhabitants, I have coined a dialectic comprising the cartographical and the phenomenological. Building on de Certeau's body of work on urban experience and Doreen Massey's (2005) distinction between *place* and *space*, the cartographical and the phenomenological offer ways of theorising how space and place are produced. The cartographical refers to maps and mapping practices; specifically, its coinage serves to conceptualise the origin and maintenance of a parochial or *tabular* view of space, or place, as theorised by Massey (2005). Indeed, the purpose of the map is just that: maps are made up of systems of signs geared toward quantifying a particular area. Despite their practicality when it comes to moving through or between place(s), maps are not to be understood as politically neutral objects; rather, as J. B. Harley (1989) emphasises in his essay, 'Deconstructing the Map', maps require that the reader reserve some cynicism for their veracity as they neither acknowledge nor attempt to align with the social, the political and, more

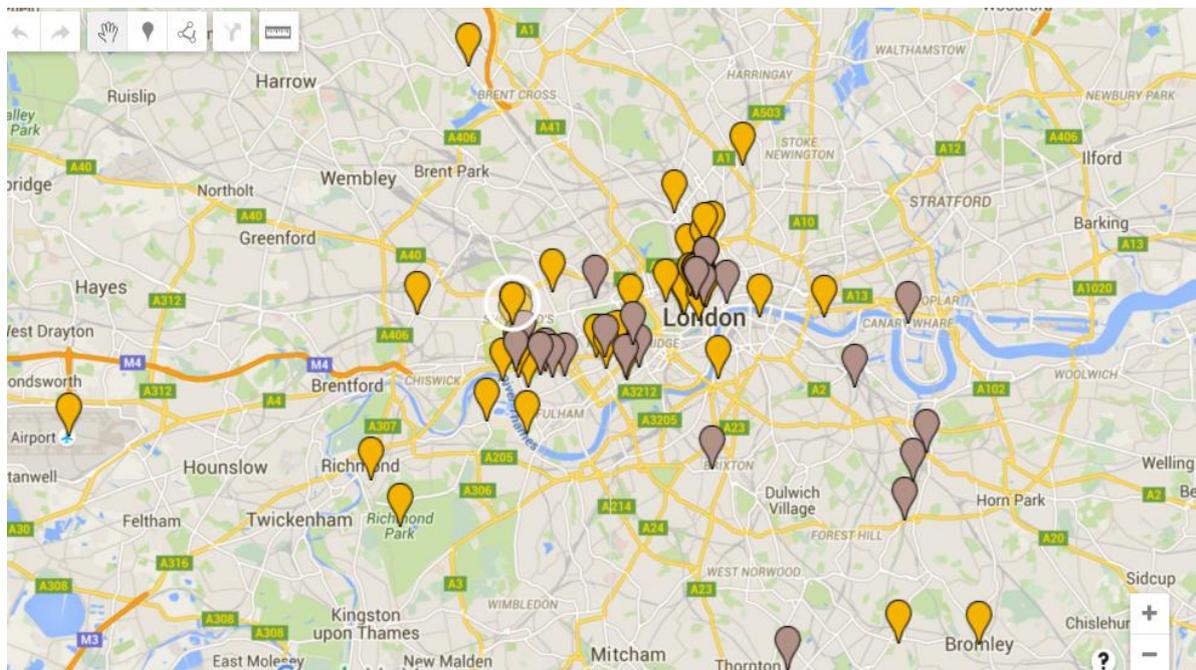
broadly, the human, aspect of space. Certainly, the map is a source of power and a discourse whose scope in terms of figuring the human is limited. Paired with its assumed supra-visory position of omniscience, the map obscures the activities of agents as well as their imperative role within spatial production. As such, maps provide only partial representations. They are motivated products, the realities of which, according to Christina Ljungberg, are 'neither true nor false since the reality to which they refer is only created by their being uttered' (Ljungberg, 2012: 2). Cartography is therefore a process of construction insofar as it is 'performative' and effectively 'generates new "realities"' (ibid), realities which are often far removed from the realities of inhabitants. Although they share little with the bodily experience of living in, and moving through, space, maps are yet invoked frequently to do so, and thus take the form of what Harley calls a 'ready-made and 'taken for granted' epistemology' (Harley, 1989). Karin Hoepker, writing more recently, concurs, stressing that maps are 'so deeply ingrained in the fabric of our episteme that our viewing habits tend to blur the difference between representational sign system and represented territory' (Hoepker, 2011: 12). In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (a book which, in short, theorises the relationship between the geographical and the political), Rosi Braidotti shares a similar view. For her, it is this ready-made epistemology, i.e. cartography, that contributes to the 'noticeable gap between how we live [...] and how we represent to ourselves this lived experience' (Braidotti, 2011: 4). A dismantling of cartography or,

at least, an inclination toward supplanting it with the phenomenological, thus represents a move toward a more pluralistic, individuated London.

Attending to both Tonkin's and Wagner's decidedly critical comments then, there is no doubt that *Something to Tell You* is acutely aware of its location and, in many respects, the novel is highly cartographical. Wagner is right, for instance, to draw attention to the *number* of London-specific places and events to which Jamal makes reference mimetically; this is true for both temporalities. The frequency with which the novel locates, or attempts to locate, itself can be seen on the geographic information system (GIS) map (Figure 1) which I created using GoogleMyMaps with a view to making explicit the collision of time-frames in *Something to Tell You*.

Figure 1

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1cyJeE0iWhrsD08t4sqki1ktum6c&usp=sharing>



GIS refers to a broad range of software-based technologies capable of capturing, analysing and collating data specific to particular geographic locations. Though it began as a tool with which to analyse population demographics, assess regional environmental impacts and plan urban development, digital visualisation technologies have since been successfully taken up by literary and film studies with a number of GIS maps spanning a great variety of spaces and times having been created in the last ten years. Notable examples include: Ian Gregory, Sally Bushell and David Cooper's collaborative GIS project, *Mapping the Lakes: Towards a Literary GIS* (2010), on the work of Thomas Gray and Samuel Coleridge; the *Map of Early Modern London* (MoEML), based on the Agas Map, first printed in 1561 (Jenstad, 2012, np); and *Mapping the City in Film*, a spatio-filmic taxonomy of Liverpool by Julia Hallam et al. (2008–10).

Here, GIS presents the opportunity to locate *Something to Tell You* within London, and to allow the novel's imaginary to engage with our perception of the 'real' city (as the 'real' relates to meshed symbolic and cartographic imaginaries). That is, I make explicit the ways in which narratives inform our production of the 'real' city by inserting the fictive locations (which, as can be seen, are neither fictive nor real in that *Something to Tell You*, in large part, draws on real places in London) within the real. All places mentioned in the novel have been plotted, coded brown and orange to correspond with past and present respectively. Brown (past) points and orange (present) points are displayed in different layers of the map. Because, via GoogleMyMaps, layers can be hidden, the viewer is able to examine past and present

separately, or in conjunction. This is hoped to provide some insight into the way Jamal Khan inhabits, and moves through, the city, as he tries and fails to separate past and present. The use of GIS mapping software hence becomes an effectively performative methodology—wherein I have aimed to exact the same destabilising of place (and, by extension, identity and corporeality), via a collision of time-frames, as is invoked by Kureishi.

Viewing only the single, orange-coded (present) layer, the use of GIS serves to reiterate how the cartographical can be affirming in terms of presence. The precision with which the points can be, and have been, plotted, like the production of a map, proffers the illusion of stability—a stability which is, by proxy, transferred onto the inhabitant of that place. This approach of viewing only one layer, and its stultified place-product should be taken to mirror both the approach taken by Jamal Khan as he represses his past, and its effects in relation to his sense of self. Indeed, the protagonist takes pleasure in those moments in which he is able to contain his past, and therefore remain present (and, as a result, realise bodily *presence*). Jamal enjoys a Stone Roses gig at Earls Court; has lunches and dinners at various well-known locations including Fortnum & Mason, the Royal Academy of Arts and The Ivy; and the Groucho Club was his and his ex-girlfriend, Karen's favourite haunt.

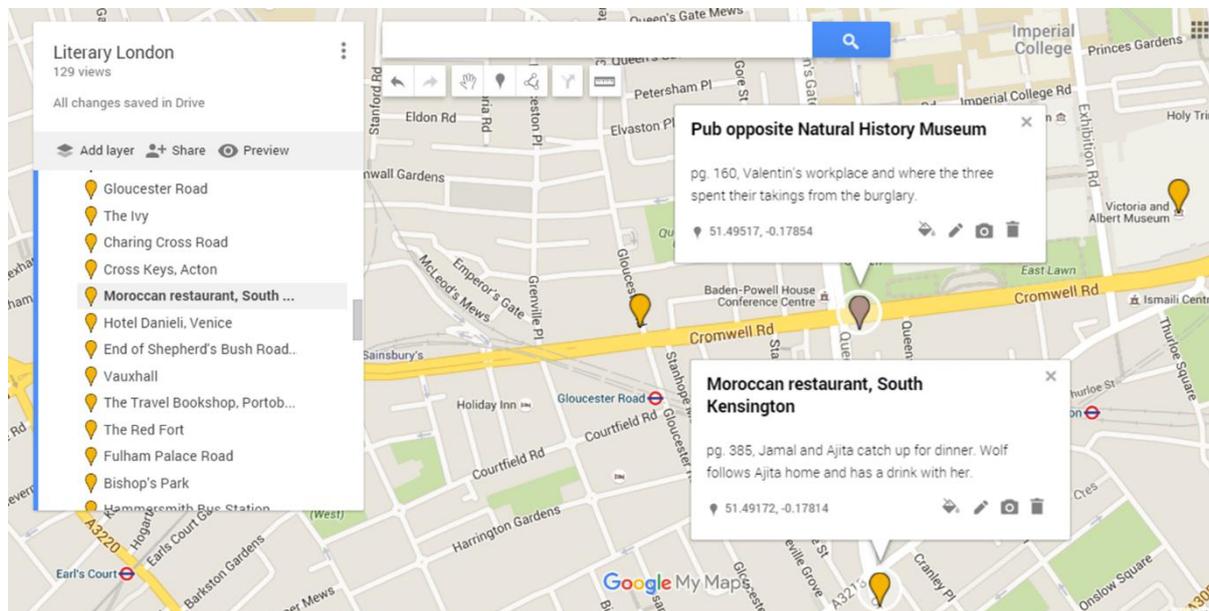
However, because GIS allows for multiple layers, and hence facilitates the juxtaposition of the novel's two time-frames as they are experienced by the narrator, we can see how Kureishi's London becomes more than cartographical (in the conventional, or myopic sense, outlined earlier). Because Jamal takes time to

differentiate between the time-frames and their corresponding spaces, and the GIS map created mirrors this distinction with its colour-coding, Londons of past and present continually intertwine over the course of the narrative—threatening the narrator’s situatedness and drawing attention to the city’s peculiar temporal ambivalence. Capable of representing this temporal dialogism by way of its dual-layer display, the GIS map thus performs the novel’s spatial singularity and contributes to the reconceptualisation of London that *Something to Tell You* advocates.

This is most overt during Jamal’s various revisitations to places from the past, during which he and the reader ‘must be both places [sic] at once’ (Berger, 1999: 5), and hence must concede any vision of London as whole or unified (and, by extension, any vision of the self as whole or unified). He catches up with Ajita over dinner, for instance, approximately less than four hundred metres away from the pub where he, Wolf and Valentin spent their takings from what was to be their last burglary (Figure 2).

Figure 2

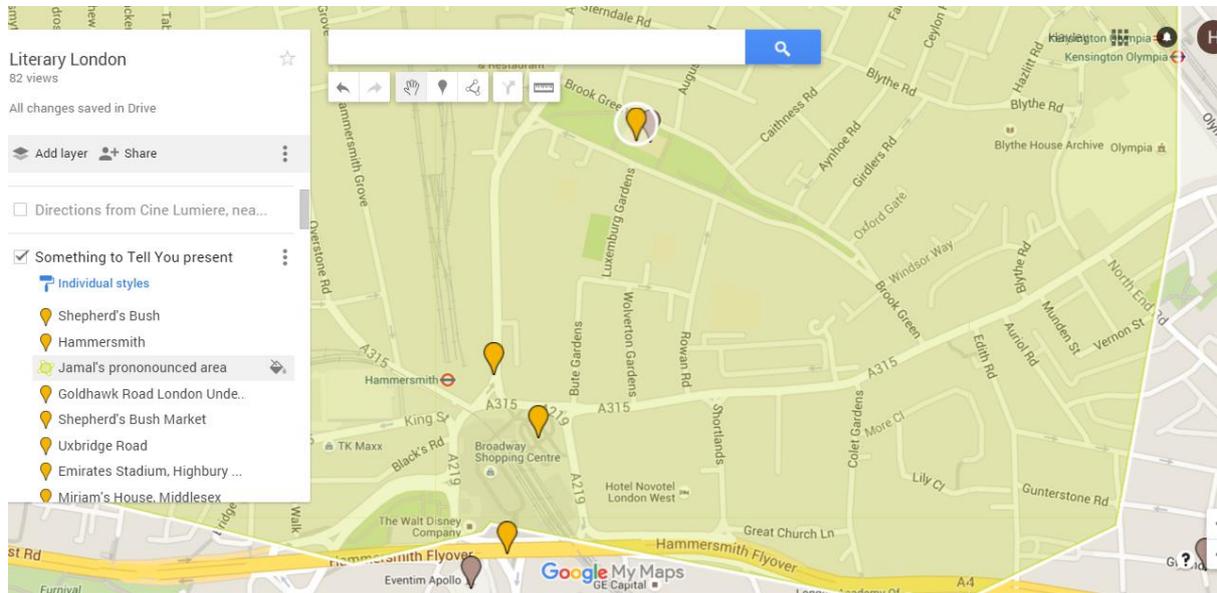
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The episode, during which the three of them take an assortment of goods from an old couple's house behind Ajita's home, occurs immediately before Ajita tells Jamal the truth about her father raping her—the catalyst for what becomes her father's murder. Likewise, Jamal contextualises the present in terms of the past, revealing that Wolf used to play tennis at Brook Green courts), 'not far' from where he lives and where he now takes Rafi for tennis lessons (Kureishi, 2008: 59–60; see Figure 3).

Figure 3

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1cyJeE0iWhrsD08t4sqki1ktum6c&usp=sharing>



Indeed, the appearance of Jamal's young son throughout the narrative prompts him to consider his own fading youth. Rafi, like London and like the narrator, grows up too fast. Kureishi himself has spoken about his experience of time, particularly as it informed his writing process. At the birth of his twins and, later, the death of his father, he says:

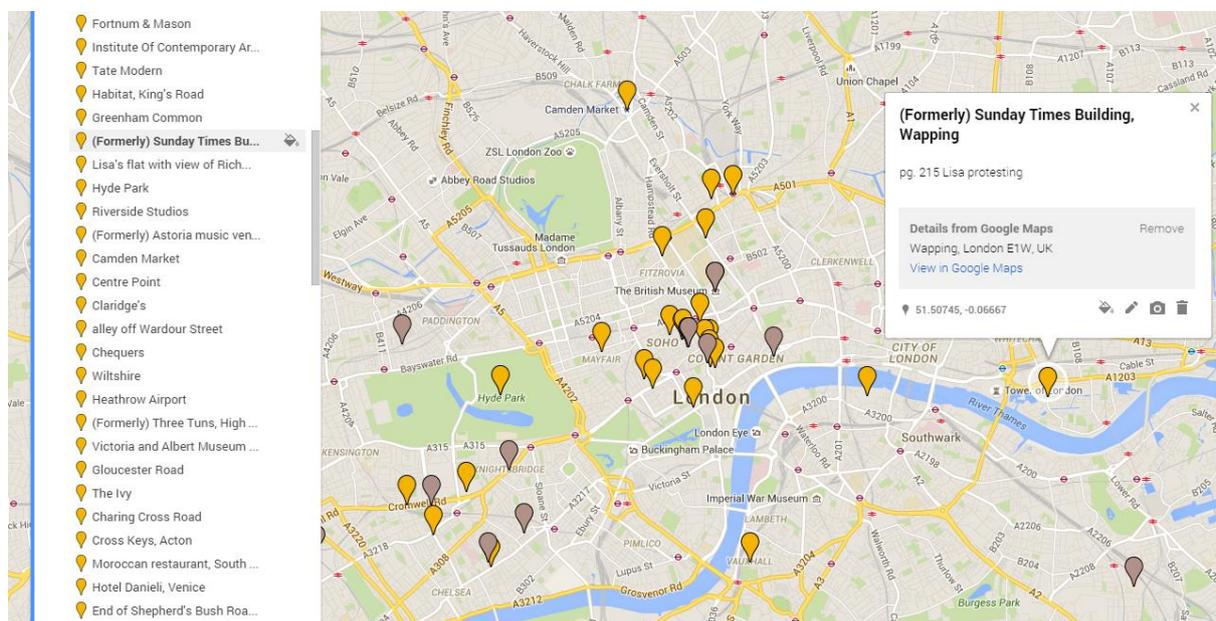
I found I was shoved into the next zone. I'd been this kid with long hair, hanging around in London, taking drugs and having sex with girls. Suddenly, I was getting up at seven in the morning and taking my kids to the park. My life switched. I'd become an adult. These kids were looking to me as a father and I was responsible.

(Kureishi in McCrum, 2014)

The city's unsettled temporal location is most striking during episodes in which Jamal not only contextualises but enunciates present spaces in the context of the past. As the GIS map highlights, there are a number of locations listed which are preceded by 'formerly' in parenthesis (Figure 4).

Figure 4

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Not only has Highbury since become the Emirates Stadium, but so too have the Sunday Times headquarters, the Astoria music venue and The Three Tuns pub referenced in the novel been demolished, re-purposed or redeveloped. Making reference to Highbury, the Astoria and the Sunday Times headquarters, closed in 2006, 2009 and 2012 respectively, serves to draw attention to Jamal's—and indeed the novel's—temporal interiority and the singularity of Kureishi's representation of the city. Their invocation highlights the frequency with which the narrator is compelled

to return to the past in order to resolve present spaces as well as marking London's accelerated development. In their essay 'Ghosts in the City' de Certeau and Giard (1998) draw attention to the ways in which the urban space is, at once, an accumulation of the past and a projection of the future, resulting in a present which is ambivalent: temporally and spatially unfixed. For de Certeau and Giard, architecture is at the centre of such urban ambivalence; the remains of past buildings, they write, 'burst forth within the modernist, massive, homogenous city like slips of the tongue from an unknown, perhaps unconscious language' (1998: 133). It is these *de facto slips of the tongue* by Jamal that continuously relocate the narrator to not simply a past figuration of London but a present London figured by the past.

Of course, the reader only recognises these are 'past buildings' because of their own spatio-temporal position outside the text, and thus the reader effectively contributes to the spatial displacement manipulated by the novel's dialogic temporality. This appeal to the hermeneutic sphere is most acute in the case of Kureishi's involuntary resurrection of The Three Tuns. The re-purposing of the pub at which the late David Bowie regularly performed took place some years after Kureishi's novel was published: after a brief name change to The Rat and Parrot, The Three Tuns finally became a Zizzi's (an Italian restaurant franchise) in May 2011. This spatial irony produced in the wake of the novel's publication requires that the reader hold in mind two ontological and, indeed, spatio-temporal frames at once and, moreover, at the slippage or fusion of those frames, is forced to concede London's ambivalence or simultaneous existence in past and present. Likewise, in terms of

belonging more generally, Jamal becomes a victim of the novel form's temporality and he is stationed in a London since overwritten. London's rapid urban development is highlighted and, indeed, performed by the novel's temporality itself.

As eagle-eyed critics of Kureishi will note, this is not the first time readers have convened at The Three Tuns. *The Buddha of Suburbia's* Karim and his father, Haroon, share a pint at the pub before heading to Eva Kay's home. In fact, *Something to Tell You* is haunted by various literary as well as architectural spectres, the appearance of which contribute to Jamal's spatial and temporal displacement. The protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim Amir, makes a cameo appearance, as does his idol and the object of his affection in the novel, Charlie Hero. And as metafiction goes, there is none as bold as Jamal confusing the punk musician for Stephen Hero (Kureishi, 2008: 280), who, as scholarly readers will know, is the pseudonym James Joyce donned for his autobiography, published posthumously. Whether we read into the insertion of Joyce (a renowned writer of the city and one of the first to complicate the coherence of urban space) or not, these allusions to facts and fictions prior are nevertheless significant. By compiling real and imagined as well as past and present texts in tandem, *Something to Tell You* places doubt upon the very corporeality of protagonist, Jamal Khan. He becomes one story of many, and a figure whose significance is placed in dialogue with the innumerable personal and literary histories of the city. As Perfect highlights further: 'London represents a symbolic space as much as—if not more so than—it represents a particular geographical location [...] London does not just contain plurality but is, itself, plural' (Perfect, 2014: 26).

This inherent plurality stands in direct antagonism with both the mappable or collectively imagined *place* that is London and, by way of metafiction, *Something to Tell You* appears to reflect on that difficulty of writing about something which is, by definition, multiple and thus unnarratable. More than that, the novel's intratextual semblances and intertextual impulses call to mind the sharing of public and private space by which the capital is, now—more so than ever—defined. The return of real (or, at least, what the reader must invest in as real) and imagined pasts signifies the taking place of a reverse process of erasure wherein the novel itself calls into question its own centrality and fidelity, interrogating the act of imagining or writing the city. Indeed, *Something to Tell You's* political and poetic ambivalence constantly displaces, and renders untenable, the idea of a London *par excellence*, essentially removing the ground from beneath its protagonist's feet. Haunted as it is by diegetic and non-diegetic literary, architectural, topographical and political spectres, the novel puts forward a new way of thinking about the cartographical as phenomenological, and the phenomenological as cartographical standpoint, ultimately producing a radically plural insight, torn by ambivalence, into what it means to be in London in the wake of personal trauma but, more than that, in light of the city's relentless and mutable particularity.

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