Éva Pataki

On the Move

The Tourist and the Flâneur in Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism*

Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism* (2006), as a contemporary British Asian novel, counts as postcolonial fiction yet adds a post-postcolonial and postmodern twist by presenting itself in the context of tourism. Although generally perceived as pulp fiction for its provocative themes and pornographic scenes, the novel's portrayal of the second-generation immigrant experience, urban space and tourism invites a close reading from the perspectives of spatiality and movement, as well as an analysis that is interdisciplinary in its approach, its theoretical background situated at the intersection of tourism, cultural, postcolonial and diaspora studies. The present paper investigates Dhaliwal's novel in terms of the relationship of identity, space and movement, or more specifically what I call mobile subjectivities: the figures of the tourist and the flâneur, and argues that the basic elements of flânerie and tourism are indispensable attributes of British Asians' diasporic identity and experience, and thus integral to the analysis of movement and subjectivity in British Asian fiction.

1 Tourism

Bhupinder, the protagonist and autodiegetic narrator of Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism*, who goes by the nickname Puppy, is a young second-generation Punjabi immigrant living and working in London, or rather idly strolling the streets of the metropolis, observing people and places and seeking physical pleasure at various places of entertainment. When asked to explain what he is about, Puppy identifies himself in the following way: "I'm a tourist. . . I just look at the view" (85).[1] This self-identification echoes the words of another decadent protagonist, namely Michel in the French author Michel Houellebecq's controversial novel, Platform: "what I really want, basically, is to be a tourist. We dream what dreams we can afford."[2] According to Silvia Albertazzi, "Dhaliwal has never denied his debt to

---

1. All parenthetical references are to this edition: Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, *Tourism* (London: Vintage, 2006).
2. Michel Houellebecq, *Platform*, trans. Frank Wynne (New York: Knopf, 2003).

Houellebecq: his views on sex and race as well as his critique of Western consumerism and narcissism are clearly modelled on those of the French novelist."[3] Although both characters engage in some sort of tourist activities, and both display the detachment and shallow interests of the tourist, as well as a postmodern cynicism and alienation, Puppy's tourism also suggests further connotations of the figure of the tourist, such as that of the ethnographer and the second-generation immigrant as an outsider in his home country – notions that I shall return to and investigate further on.

But Puppy conforms to what is defined as tourist behaviour only in certain respects. The only occasion when he really follows the patterns of tourist behaviour is when he is invited for a long weekend at the country house of his love interest Sarupa Shah, in the heart of the Cotswolds: "I was on my way to see a bit of real England and was looking forward to it" (119). Puppy is streetwise and world-weary, knows his way about in the multicultural metropolis, but he has never really seen the country (usually identified with authentic Englishness); his excitement about this first-time experience seems genuine and childlike, also suggesting a desire for an (in)authentic[4] tourist experience. He explores the countryside with the consciousness and preparedness of both a tourist and a tourist guide, reciting the history and architecture of the village learned from the Internet, studded with the clichés of a Baedeker: "England is a beautiful country and Chipping Campden is the epitome of English rural beauty. The buildings are historic artefacts, protected by law; shops and offices are located in pristine honey-coloured terraces, built with lime-rich Cotswold stone. . ." (120). Puppy's preparations and superficial knowledge imply that he is in search of the signs of Englishness, and he is "reading landscapes and cultures as sign systems."[5] According to Sabine Nunius, Puppy "has evidently internalised the association of Englishness with a specific type of scenery" as well as "various quintessentially 'English' ideas and clichés,"[6] thus associating the English countryside with "the

---

3. Silvia Albertazzi, "Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's Tourism: How to Exploit Diaspora and Live Happily Ever After," in *Diasporic Subjectivity and Cultural Brokering in Contemporary Post Colonial Literatures*, ed. Igor Maver (Lanham: Lexington, 2009), 165–178, p. 168.

4. On their opposing views on the authenticity of the tourist experience see Dean MacCannell, "Staged Authenticity: Arrangement of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *American Journal of Sociology* 79.3 (1973) 589–603, and Daniel Joseph Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper, 1964).

5. Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 161.

6. Sabine Nunius, *Coping with Difference: New Approaches in the Contemporary British Novel (2000–2006)* (Berlin: Lit; New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009), p. 125.

hope of a more wholesome, safer, less regulated way of life than available in the city."[7] This suggests Puppy's ambivalent insider-outsider status in England, by implying the contradictory position in yet resonant perception of the English countryside by the Englishman and the tourist.

An "ultra-urban homeboy" (103) "born into city life" (7), Puppy is used to walking in the crowds and gazing at the familiar cityscape – in the country, however, he witnesses a "quiet, easy and predictable" (120) life. He finds himself gazing at a space alien to him both culturally and in terms of class: "The atmosphere here was of complete tranquillity. People walked quietly about their business; unlike in London, they were generally older and unhurried. There was plenty of money here... history seemed set in the walls; it leaked from the stone, into my thoughts. The aura of these buildings impressed me" (121). It is exactly the unfamiliarity of rural space and it being "a cultural construct, a product of imagination"[8] that enables Puppy to perceive it through the tourist's eyes and to engage in pleasurable tourist activities.

Although there are several definitions in use, and many diverse forms of tourism, most theories agree on two significant aspects: first, that the tourist is "one who travels for pleasure,"[9] and, second, that the "gaze" is an essential part of tourist behaviour and tourism practices, which "involve the notion of departure, of a limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one's senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane."[10] Puppy's behaviour in the countryside conforms to most of the characteristics of the social practices of tourism identified in John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze*: Urry defines tourism as a leisure activity as well as a movement to and a period spent in various destinations outside one's normal place of residence and work, which one intends to return to in a relatively short time. Puppy also follows what Urry says about the tourist gaze, which, on the one hand, is "constructed through signs" and "directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience."[11] Puppy, accordingly, begins by noticing and appreciating the features that he has read about – seeing what he already knows. On the other hand – continues Urry – places are chosen to be gazed upon, "because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleas-

---

7. Clive Aslet, *Anyone for England? A Search for British Identity* (London: Little, Brown, 1997), p. 173.

8. Aslet, p. 173.

9. Erik Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change*, Tourism Social Science Series, (Boston: Elsevier, 2004), p. 19.

10. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, Theory, Culture, and Society (London: Sage, 1990), p. 2.

11. Urry, p. 3.

ures."[12] Theoretician Erik Cohen also emphasises the pleasure-component of tourism: "A 'tourist' is a voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round trip."[13] Puppy's pleasure, however, eventually exceeds the joy of recognising something he has seen in a guidebook: in the countryside, he finds both beauty and pleasure at its purest, and not only in the predictable "touristy" things: besides the landscape and the eclectic and culturally rich interior of the Shahs' house, he also enjoys the beauty and pleasure offered by a lively and loving dog. The generally aloof, wry and uninterested Puppy seems to come to life in rural space as he is "entering the envelope of [Sarupa's] life" (124), and is also reminded of the roots he has never felt his own: "I felt good. I could smell the country – a healthy gust of cut grass, flowers and dung – and relished it. It reminded me of India" (122).

What is particularly noteworthy – and perhaps not unrelated to the intimation of India – is the fact that, even though the "tourist" aspect of the trip reeks of clichés, Puppy's tourism does lead to a genuine experience of bonding with Sarupa:

> I was truly at ease with her. The light in her eyes proved that I had nothing to fear. I had always been tense before, too concerned with what she might think of me; as a result, I was over-cocky. Our walk in the country had opened doors between us. We'd talked and laughed; I held her hand as we climbed over gates. . . . We looked openly into one another's eyes and shared moments of comfortable silence. I knew now that she liked me. I felt secure and unworried. (191–2)

After having lusted for Sarupa for years, Puppy's dreams finally come true: on the long walk to the nearby village to taste his first ever cream tea (an epitome of Englishness, reduced to a sign), the two of them finally open up, have a meaningful conversation sharing future plans and childhood memories, and eventually make love in an old graveyard. The reason for this unlikely yet natural union, complicated by Sarupa's engagement and social status, as well as Puppy's fear of commitment and belonging, may be the fact that for the first time in years Puppy stops pretending to be something he is not; he avows himself as a Sikh, sets aside his languidity, and places confidence in Sarupa. By doing so, he enables rural space and human relationships to influence his identity formation. Breaking away from his everyday behaviour and practices, Puppy experiences new joys and perceives hitherto unseen beauties on his pleasure trip in rural England; he acquires a sense of belonging in a place other than his home and at the same time becomes a tourist in his own country.

---

12. Urry, p. 3.
13. Cohen, p. 23.

2 The Tourist versus the Flâneur

Upon his return to the city, the multicultural space in which he claims to be a tourist, Puppy walks along familiar streets again, gazing the city and its inhabitants in search of pleasure. Being in his normal place of residence and looking at familiar sights, Puppy's is not a classic case of tourism but a mere identity performance.[14] By claiming to be a tourist, he is trying to give a name to his sense of unbelonging, or perhaps to put on a mask to conceal his otherness and detachment: "I'd have to feel relevant to the world in order to care about it. I don't" (85). The mask of the tourist, thus, signals both Puppy's alienation from people and places, and his inability and unwillingness to belong. It is exactly this unbelonging that may testify the special position of second-generation British Asians and justifies Dhaliwal's unusual representation of them. In Albertazzi's view, "*Tourism* can be seen as a step ahead in the representation of the children of the Indian diaspora: the young second-generation Asian does not want to achieve success in the whites' world any longer nor does he live as an in-between. . . He does not look nor feel any kind of belonging: he just wants to take advantage of the whites, invade their own territory and colonize it by way of using and abusing their women and their things."[15] Puppy's "tourist behaviour" in London is, then, both a state of mind and a mask, seemingly manifested in hardly more than constant movement and a reluctance to feel attached to his environment.

To understand the logic of Puppy's metropolitan perambulations, we must look at the point of departure first: for Puppy, the starting point is the London suburb of Southall, a multicultural and diasporic space (with the largest concentration of South Asians in Britain), close to the metropolis but still on the periphery, an in-between space inhabited by "inbetweeners," first and second generation immigrants living in closely-knit communities. Puppy, however, does not experience a sense of community and communion; his satiric depiction of his family already emphasises alienation and a refusal to belong: "Behold!, the Asian family: unit of tradition, moral strength and business acumen. Behold!, my mother: matriarch and fulcrum, proud bearer of sons" (34). Puppy's family appears to be Other in more ways than one: different from the dominant British culture and the traditional diasporic family as well, as Puppy's father had left them, making the mother turn into a religious zealot and enabling her to establish matriarchy as the ruling domestic order.

His mother's insistence on strict cultural and religious rules forces the young Puppy into the fixed identity of the racial Other at school, perceived with fellow Asians as "pariahs for being explicit wogs" (45), and also triggers the process of alienation,

---

14. The concept of identity performance is based on Judith Butler's theory of performativity introduced in *Undoing Gender* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004).

15. Albertazzi, p. 169.

both from his culture and his family. Repelled by a mother who "looked like an animal" (34) and an "old-world recidivist" (36) sister, ashamed by his own failure to stand by his naive brother, Puppy's connection with his family is reduced to the financial help he occasionally asks for: "She knew the cash was the only reason I was there. I couldn't look her in the face" (38). When Puppy moves to London to become a journalist, his perpetual movement between spaces and locations begins: first by commuting between Southall and East London, then, having set up a temporary second home in Hackney, which proves to be equally downtrodden and static, by criss-crossing the metropolis. Puppy is fleeing both from his roots and the stasis and dullness of the suburbs; he longs for the mobility and anonymity of the city, where he could "lose himself in a crowd" and enjoy "feverish delights."[16] There are two propelling forces for his purposeless wanderings: the pursuit of pleasure and his desire for Sarupa. Puppy exploits his exotic otherness, makes the necessary connections, uses and abuses people to achieve his goals: he starts a relationship with the model Sophie to get closer to Sarupa and to enjoy the comfort and wealth offered by the company of the upper-middle class. Setting up makeshift homes and relationships of convenience, Puppy is gradually uprooting himself and purposely choosing to be a failure, the opposite of all his mother's hopes and "immigrant zeal" (8).

Uprooted and unbelonging, Puppy finds pleasure in a life without constraints and a self in fluidity, contesting his imposed fixed identity; he abandons his roots and resorts to tourism in which "everyday obligations are suspended or inverted."[17] His is a deliberate choice of non-attachment and nonconformity: he is living in a city but not inhabiting it, assimilating to society but avoiding full integration, refusing a fixed identity but applying mimicry[18] to fit in, moving from one location to another but never staying for long. The main destinations of his short journeys are places of entertainment and the beds of various women, including a prostitute, making him a "pleasure tripper"[19] (a one-day traveller who covers a relatively short distance for the sake of pleasure or entertainment), and at the same time an observer of multicultural space and its inhabitants. Such subject positions do evoke certain aspects of tourism and may further explain Puppy's self-identification as a tourist.

Puppy's peregrinations in London, his strolling frequented streets and places, visiting places of entertainment, as well as his 'couch-hopping' display typical tourist behaviour. His individual version of tourism, however, is also characterised by directionless wandering and following routine paths between various locations – his rented

16. Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 20.

17. Urry, p. 10.

18. On Homi K. Bhabha's theory of mimicry see his *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

19. On Wall's term of the pleasure tripper see Cohen, p. 25.

flat in Hackney, Sophie's apartment in Holland Park, his friend Luca's house in Belgravia, his family home in Southall – which suggest a kind of "local migration." In her analysis of the British Asian novels of the 1980s, Susheila Nasta claims that the local migrations they portray "seek to explore new 'routes' for maintaining and domesticating the 'other within.' "[20] Taking advantage of his visible otherness, Puppy selects "those elements of his parents' religion and culture which fit conveniently into his own Westernised lifestyle while simply abandoning other, less convenient ones"[21] in favour of a more sophisticated urban look. Owing to this mimicry in terms of clothing and front, Puppy can adopt an insider status in the city, as opposed to the outsiderness of the tourist. Wherever he goes, he observes multicultural London and its inhabitants, providing adept descriptions of architecture and interior design, as well as the native inhabitant's detailed accounts of the people and places: "deserted council houses" (114) and abominable poor white people in Hackney, upper class women in Primrose Hill with "genes refined by generations of monied men marrying attractive women" (157) or "the usual Soho crowd: homos, tourists and theatregoers" (104). Puppy's description of the Japanese tourists with their dyed hair and quality clothes is both valid and sarcastic, highlighting the differences between them and the Indian diaspora:

> The Japanese are obsessed with Western culture . . . and never seem out of place in London, 12,000 miles from home. Indians, even when born here, are rarely so at ease. The West jars with them, and they cocoon themselves with religion, arranged marriages and extended families. The Japanese have an osmotic character. . . Indians are less permeable.   (104–5)

The very fact that Puppy can provide these pieces of information suggests that he is not a tourist in the ordinary sense of an outsider, a temporary visitor, someone who has to use a Baedeker or a guide to get about. Puppy is a resident of London and clearly knows the place and its inhabitants inside out. Thus, while in the countryside his tourism evokes an association with Robert Chi's notion of "the tourist as ethnographic agent,"[22] in the city he is more of a tourist guide than a tourist, or an anthropologist describing a well-known world, or an "informant," James Clifford's anthropological concept referring to individuals who are "routinely made to speak for 'cultural' knowledge . . . have their own 'ethnographic' proclivities and interesting histories of travel," who are "insiders and outsiders," who "first appear as na-

---

20. Susheila Nasta, Home Truths, Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 181.

21. Nunius, p. 136.

22. Ellen Dengel-Janic, " 'East is East and West is West': A Reading of Nirpal Dhaliwal's *Tourism* (2006)," in *Multi-ethnic Britain 2000+: New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Arts*, eds. Lars Eckstein *et al.* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2008), 341–354, p. 345.

tives," then as "travellers," but are in fact "specific mixtures of the two"[23] – that is, they are anything but tourists. Consequently, though he designates himself as a tourist, what Puppy does is tourism only in a very limited or partial sense – the tourism of the pleasure-seeker. Otherwise, Puppy uses tourism as a mask, as a metaphor of his sense of alienation and outsider status in the eyes of society. Moreover, his self-positioning as a tourist, as a mere observer is, according to Nunius, "intended to validate the evaluation of all other [social and ethnic] groups since – according to his own statements – he is the only one in a position to comment adequately on them because he is not truly involved with any community."[24]

Puppy's strolls in the streets of the metropolis are those of an alienated, solitary loafer, who enjoys both the pleasures of the city and the decadency of his lifestyle. During his walks, he observes people and buildings, and accompanies his observations with sarcastic remarks and, in Nunius's view, "essentialising, stereotypical associations,"[25] which he later records in his memoirs. Throughout the novel, Puppy keeps mentioning his walks and observations: "I prowled around Victoria" (10), "I looked out of the window and watched people walk in and out of a shop across the street" (70), "I walked up the street and around a few corners. I came across a small Bangladeshi tea house and decided to have some lunch. . . . I watched the artisans and fashionistas of Brick Lane walking past outside" (96). Puppy's comments are those of the detached observer and "the hidden man" – the latter referring to what Walter Benjamin calls the "Dialectic of flânerie," a phenomenon when "on one side, the man feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man."[26]

Most of the time Puppy remains unobserved, having managed to blend in by applying mimicry in terms of his clothing, locations and company of wealthy friends, and also because he strives for the anonymity of the crowds offered by the metropolis. As an observer, Puppy loathes being observed, particularly because of the biased comments and perceptions concerning his identity:

> I stopped at a pub en route [to Victoria]. It had a mock-Tudor facade, laced with ivy; inside it was dark and sparsely furnished. I walked to the bar and waited to be served. A pack of beer-bellied white men stood in a loose circle nearby; they stopped mid-conversation to throw me a collective, un-

---

23. Clifford, p. 19.
24. Nunius, p. 112.
25. Nunius, p. 111.
26. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999), p. 420.

welcome stare. Someone mumbled something, probably about me. I
avoided their gaze and ordered a beer.   (10–11)

Interestingly, while Puppy is perceived as the racial Other, his manners – uttering
such "elegances" as "please" and "no thank you" – eventually win over the locals and
he temporarily becomes a member of their community, ceasing to be the object of
their gaze: "Their smiles beamed 'what a nice boy'. I smiled back at their cracked,
powder-dry white faces" (11). Similarly to what is described in this scene, although
Puppy walks or sits among people most of the time, converses with them and occa-
sionally even returns their looks or smiles, he does not mingle with them but keeps a
certain distance; he remains unattached, inaccessible and irrelevant in the city: "Sev-
eral million people were out there, ploughing several million furrows. Barely a handful
knew or cared anything about me" (168).

Despite his inability to attach or belong, Puppy, as opposed to tourists, is at home
in the city, which suggests a more likely association of his character with another form
of movement in urban space: flânerie. The figure of the flâneur was originally used in
connection with nineteenth-century Paris, most famously by Walter Benjamin in his
analysis of Charles Baudelaire, but has since made its way into postmodern theories as
well.[27] The nineteenth-century flâneur was a gentleman strolling the Parisian streets in
a leisurely way (often with a turtle for an elegant and slow pace), providing "a poetic
vision of the public places and spaces of Paris"[28] as a detached observer. Baudelaire's
flâneur-poet "is only at home existentially when he is not at home physically"[29] and his
anonymity is "a play of masks"[30] in the crowd. Based on Baudelaire, Benjamin's
flâneur is an estranged, solitary stroller experiencing urban space as a sensational
phenomenon; he is a product of modern life, an unobserved observer, an all-seeing
representative of the modern gaze and . . . his invisibility amid the crowd."[31] Benjamin
also emphasises the joyful idleness of the flâneur: "Basic to flânerie . . . is the idea that
the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor. The flâneur, as is well
known, makes studies."[32] I suggest that Puppy's character is a flâneur in a Baude-
lairean and Benjaminian sense, manifested in his habit of strolling and observing, in
an anonymity achieved by wearing masks in the crowd, and in the productive idleness
of enjoying and studying the city.

---

27. See Keith Tester, *The Flâneur* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 1.
28. Tester, p. 1.
29. Baudelaire, p. 399.
30. Baudelaire, p. 400.
31. Carlo Salzani, *Constellations of Reading: Walter Benjamin in Figures of Actuality*
(Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 47.
32. Benjamin, p. 453.

Nonetheless, certain differences may be detected between Benjamin's and Puppy's respective flâneur-figures: for the Benjaminian flâneur, the arcades served as the primary space for observation; Puppy, on the other hand, haunts public spaces of entertainment where he can observe but be unobserved, hiding behind his sunglasses and the masks of role-play. The Benjaminian flâneur was a literary creature and a modern man; Puppy as an aspiring writer lacks the inspiration and creativity to write a novel – though being an aesthete, obsessed with physical beauty, does link him with the late-nineteenth-century flâneur. Furthermore, with all his anxieties, alienation and detachment, Puppy is what Vytautas Kavolis calls a postmodern man, characterized by a "decentralized personality."[33] For him "the self is experienced in the expanding peripheries, or at the vanishing horizons" and "all elements of behaviour have the same rights" so that "personality must become . . . disorganized and asystemic."[34] Furthermore, Puppy's first person narration posits him as an observer and commentator on the postmodern conditions of metropolitan life. Hence, he may be termed a postmodern flâneur, "who turns away from his own culture, and instead seeks access to upper class lifestyle"[35] and who is just as much enjoying life in the city as he is despising it, due to his own wrong choices concerning pleasures. The relation of choice and joy is also emphasised by Zygmunt Baumann, whose postmodern flâneur is a man of choices, who may happen on "the secret of city happiness," which consists in "knowing how to enhance the adventure brought about by that under-determination of one's own destination and itinerary."[36] This under-determination can eventually lead to pleasure and freedom, for "the experience of estrangement is lived through as pleasurable."[37]

Puppy condenses many of the features of both the modern and the postmodern flâneur, and these features, I argue, correlate with some attributes of the tourist, thus creating a multiple identity at the intersection of migrancy, flânerie and tourism. Urry suggests a similar link between the figures of the flâneur and the postmodern tourist; he highlights the Benjaminian flâneur's anonymity and ability to "travel, to arrive, to gaze, to move on" and acknowledges him as "a forerunner of the twentieth-century

---

33. Vytautas Kavolis, "*Post-modern Man*: Psychocultural Responses to Social Trends," *Social Problems* 17 (1970) 435–448, p. 438.

34. Kavolis, pp. 438–9.

35. Dengel-Janic, p. 347.

36. Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), p. 127.

37. Heinz Paetzold, "Rethinking Key Concepts of Modern Urban Culture: *Flânerie* and the City as Theatre," in *Senses and the City: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Urban Sensescapes*, eds. Madalina Diaconu *et al.* (Vienna and Berlin: Münster Verlag, 2011), 33–47, p. 38.

tourist."[38] Bauman, by the same token, emphasizes the tourist's aestheticising gaze: "The tourist's world is fully and exclusively structured by *aesthetic* criteria."[39] [original emphasis] By romanticising the metropolis and its sensational phenomenon, the nineteenth-century flâneur also becomes an aesthete in his own right, and thus shares the tourist's aestheticising gaze as well. However, the identities of tourists and flâneurs do not, cannot merge entirely, as the two terms display a considerable semantic tension. The flâneur's trajectories are made in spaces that he knows well, and within which he seeks for adventure by exposing himself to the romance and randomness of metropolitan life; the tourist, on the other hand, visits unfamiliar places, and his adventures are frequently predetermined and guided, and therefore inauthentic. The flâneur as a hidden man remains anonymous in his observations; the tourist is strongly visible and identifiable by various physical markers, such as his camera or a map in his hand. For the flâneur observing is a direct physical experience; the tourist, however, may gaze at places indirectly, through frames e.g. the lens of the camera or the window of the tourbus. Puppy's observations are mainly conducted through frames: a windscreen and a pair of expensive sunglasses as he is driving across London, or the windows of his flat in Hackney and of various bars and restaurants. Interestingly, even when he is not observing people and places through windows, Puppy is still watching "life" through frames, gazing at David Attenborough "narrating a documentary series on life in the Antarctica" (156) or at scantily-clad women in music videos accompanying the experience with smoking drugs. Puppy uses drugs frequently throughout the novel, mostly at places of entertainment; as he says: "I can't do clubs anymore... Not unless I'm loaded" (111). Numbing his senses with drugs makes him even more alienated from what he sees; by veiling the observed scenes with the blurred visions of drug trips, he is obscuring the view through the frame until it seems distant and unoriginal, thus detaching him entirely from the physical experience.

Puppy's observations through various frames and his pursuit of pleasure trigger further associations with tourism, and particularly with the concept of post-tourism. The emergence of post-tourism is a result of a postmodern trend in tourism and is discussed by several theoreticians excessively (Maxine Feifer, 1985; Urry, 1990; Rojek; 1993; Ritzer and Liska, 1997; Cohen, 2004). Post-tourism transforms the "processes by which the gaze is produced and consumed"[40] and is mainly characterised by the debasement of originality and seeking pleasure in inauthentic, superficial experiences. In Maxine Feifer's interpretation the post-tourist may gaze upon places indirectly, i.e.

---

38. Urry, p. 138.

39. Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1996), 18–36, p. 30.

40. Urry, p. 101.

he or she "sees *named* scenes through a *frame*"[41] [original emphasis]: a windscreen, the television or video. Furthermore, for the post-tourist "tourism is . . . a whole series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience."[42] According to Urry, the post-tourist "delights in the multitude of games that can be played," is "above all self-conscious, 'cool' and role-distanced" and for him "[p]leasure hence comes to be anticipated and experienced in different ways than before"[43] or, as Feifer puts it, "he wants to behold . . . something just different, because he's bored."[44]

Puppy's constant need for diversity and entertainment may be associated not only with post-tourism but also with decadent aestheticism – the intellectual enjoyment of pleasure itself, elevating the pleasure of an unusual pursuit above its sensual experience, above sensual rapture – and thus with the culture of fin de siècle. Throughout the novel Puppy uses the word "beautiful" on almost every page, applying it to everything from people to buildings and antique furniture light-mindedly and generously, thus acknowledging beauty, piling it on and then depriving it of its meaning. It is only in the countryside where Puppy takes a chance at looking behind the facade of beauty and embraces its emotional aspects as well, letting Stan, the dog, and Sarupa close to him. Back in the city and after years of living intensely, Puppy's hunger for pleasure and satisfaction can no longer be easily satisfied; he is becoming increasingly blighted and disinterested: "Smoking dope hadn't been fun in years, but I smoked it anyway: what else was there to do?" (156) These elements of Puppy's pursuit of pleasure may suggest a reading of his character as a decadent post-tourist or fin-de-siècle tourist, who is both addicted to pleasure-seeking and repelled by it.

Puppy's affection for Sarupa is equally controversial; it is a permanent source of joy and pain, an elementary lust and – especially in the countryside, where he enjoys their mutual trust – a desperate desire for a spiritual bond, a longing for belonging to someone. Although Puppy still despises his traditional upbringing, learning about the initial struggles, hard work and consequent social rise of Sarupa's family makes him feel more comfortable with and proud of his origins, realising his own responsibility for being unhappy: "I belonged to a remarkable people; this made me proud. My own failings were an anomaly entirely of my own making. If I'd lived by the ethos of my race, my life would've been different, so much better" (151). Eventually, however, the feeling of guilt and spending the weekend with Sarupa's wasted upper-class friends make Puppy resume being ashamed of his roots, manifested in his hybrid accents and his incongruousness:

---

41. Urry, p. 100.

42. Urry, p. 100.

43. Urry, pp. 100–101.

44. Maxine Feifer, Going Places: *The Ways of the Tourist from Imperial Rome to the Present Day* (New York: Stein, 1985), p. 269.

> I'd never heard my voice objectively before. . . It was an absurd jumble of ac-
> cents: cockney enunciation and occasional West Indian inflection overlaid a
> quiet drone from the Punjab. . . I was taken aback by how particular I was,
> how rooted in time and place: everything about me came from the Punjab
> suburb of West London. I felt embarrassed. I realised how outlandish my
> presence here was. Everyone else belonged to a milieu of metropolitan
> wealth, their differences in colour subsumed within a shared order of money.
> Their lives were firmly aligned. Mine was experiencing just a glancing en-
> counter with theirs, before I ricocheted back to oblivion.   (189)

When Sarupa refuses to continue their relationship, Puppy feels "raw, so abject"
(181), trapped by a hedonistic lifestyle and a self-induced sense of failure. Although
non-attachment, failure and fin-de-siècle decadency were his own deliberate and con-
scious choices to live by, at the bottom of his heart Puppy never ceased to long for
genuine happiness, which he hoped to receive from and by Sarupa and which he feels
she eventually deprived him of, thus reloading his postmodern spleen and bitterness:

> Nothing I've ever wanted has come true; I was tired of being let down. I
> was tired of my own lingering, lifelong sense of incompletion. I'm a man of
> few talents; the one skill I have is the acceptance of disappointment. None-
> theless, I lay there feeling drained and beaten. I hadn't wanted much from
> life: love, safety, a sense of belonging to somewhere or someone. Instead, I
> had nothing. I listened to the people around me laughing and joking with
> one another: was everyone happy, or was everything a shroud, hiding one's
> mediocrity and sadness?   (162)

This realisation is accompanied by an unexpected opportunity for change: on what
seems to be a whim, Puppy steals the money his friend Rory entrusts him with and
flees abroad. As he is touring the big European cities, guided solely by "urban habits
and a knowledge of Europe based upon its football teams" (7), he finally feels liberated
and calm, yet after a while also "penniless and indifferent" (8), Travelling with the
purpose of sightseeing and recreation, Puppy ceases to be a flâneur; he gradually frees
himself of hedonistic desires and uproots himself as a Londoner: "London had been
my home for almost thirty years; I'd known nowhere else. She was the gorgeous, faith-
less old whore that bore me; she'd never shown me any love, but had shown me the
world and its workings. For that much, I was grateful" (240). Consequently, in con-
trast with his hitherto superficial, mask-like tourism, he becomes a real tourist, who
chooses his destinations, sets on a journey and gazes at unfamiliar sights. On the other
hand, his "tourist phase" does not last long, and his wanderings gradually assume the
attributes of a journey or quest: from tourist, Puppy becomes a traveller.

3 From Flâneur to Tourist to Traveller

Throughout the novel, Puppy (ex)changes locations and standpoints frequently and with ease, he deploys a range of subject positions for his gaze: the social commentator and the tabloid journalist, the informant and the detached observer, the tourist and the tour guide. In the case of Southall, Hackney or Hoxton, he provides an insider's commentary on the everyday reality of immigrants and the white underclass, reflecting on his own experiences and memories as well. In wealthy neighbourhoods, he remains an outsider, an unobserved observer, although he wishes to be mistaken for a millionaire, "a young dot-com wizard, or an ad-agency creative" (222), which he hopes to achieve by resorting to mimicry with his clothing (e.g. Burberry shades, Tag Hauer watch) and his location (e.g. Holland Park). Puppy's roles as a journalist, future entrepreneur, or tourist are all cases of identity performance*:* putting on masks and thus employing chosen subjectivities as a compensation for not being able or not wanting to identify with any political, ethnic or cultural identity. On the other hand, such identity performances may be perceived as light-hearted games, playful try-outs of various subjectivities, and possible aspects of a fluid identity.

It is by the end of the novel that the fluidity of Puppy's identity becomes most apparent: the epilogue takes us to Egypt, the latest destination of his tour, where he is pictured as a relaxed, more spiritual and self-identical man, doing yoga at the centre where he helps out, thus turning from a tourist into a tourist-migrant (tourist migrants being "people who had originally arrived in their host-country as tourists, but decided to stay on, work and sometimes even to settle there."[45]) Having spent months "flitting around Italy and then Spain, waiting tables . . . labouring in fields and building sites" (242) and occasionally living off rich women, Puppy finally finds peace in yoga, which helps him realise the value of his mother's love and generates a genuine desire to reconnect with his roots by visiting India: "I want to see the Punjab and the village my mother left. . . I want to arrive in Delhi, knowing that this time I will kiss the tarmac, like my mother did, with tears falling from my eyes" (245). His words suggest that he definitely does not want to visit India as a tourist, but as an immigrant returning to his parents' roots, a location offering a possible sense of belonging.

According to Nunius, Puppy "finally seems to succeed in recovering his 'true self' ";[46] a "true self" as such, though, does not exist. Although Puppy seems to claim that "a satisfying identity and sense of one's 'real' self may only be found in the cultural background of one's ancestors and that 'authenticity' may only be achieved via a return to one's roots,"[47] I consider this stance as merely another stop in the life of an

---

45. Cohen, p. 26.
46. Nunius, p. 136.
47. Nunius, p. 137.

individual on the move, a place of transit for a mobile subject with a fluid identity. In my view, Puppy's is a physical and mental journey transforming him from alienated flâneur to tourist, from tourist to traveller. As he needs money for his visit, he plans to return to London – this way, his journey as a tourist proves to be a round trip, which takes him back to the point of departure, only to depart again to further destinations.

After the years-long identity performance of a tourist, Puppy becomes a traveller, but his international travels eventually point back to a tourist identity. As Cohen suggests, "the traveller [should] be viewed as 'temporary', and hence as a tourist, as long as he still possesses a permanent home to which he returns periodically or to which he intends to return eventually, even if he stays away for many years."[48] On the other hand, Puppy may also be interpreted as a traveller who "does not belong anywhere,"[49] or a free spirit who cannot be readily defined, restrained or hedged in, and thus I argue that his tourism also intersects and merges with a certain kind of nomadism. His wandering around the world resembles those of nomads in an ethnographic sense, who follow routine paths and only settle temporarily, and whose "identity is distinct from that of the rest of the society,"[50] which they maintain by systematic travelling.

Although, as Nunius asserts, Puppy essentialises individual ethnic and social groups by portraying them as homogeneous units and "apparently endorses the idea that a 'preconfigured identity' exists,"[51] his mental and physical trajectories, as well as the multiple roles and identities he displays point to the postmodern notion of the fluid, fragmentary, and unstable quality of identity. Puppy's constant spatial mobility; gazing and moving from one location, from one pleasurable inauthentic experience to another; and his continuous mental movement, changing subject positions and performing identities according to his locations, yet never being able to "evade his condition of outsider"[52] suggest an immigrant subjectivity at the intersection of tourism, flânerie and nomadism, a subjectivity which is both postmodern and uniquely British Asian, and as such it contributes to a better understanding of a multiracial Britain and of what Hanif Kureishi calls "a new way of being British."[53]

---

48. Cohen, p. 25.

49. Albertazzi, p. 169.

50. David J. Phillips, *Peoples on the Move: Introducing the Nomads of the World* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001) p. 13.

51. Nunius, p. 113.

52. Feifer, p. 271.

53. Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette and The Rainbow Sign (*London: Faber, 1986), p. 18.