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Media, Research, Politics, Culture

Review article

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- **Marie Gillespie (1995) *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change*, London: Routledge. 238 pages, ISBN 0-415-09675-X (hbk), ISBN 0-415-09675-8 (pbk).**

There have been too few studies of the Asian communities of Britain. Amongst those that exist there are still fewer that 'let young people's voices speak' (p. 74), and so it would probably be ungenerous to complain when these voices are ventriloquized in a publication of an anthropological kind. To complain also that such voices are mediated through a very strange process called 'research', involving extended study and discussion within a particular and peculiar tradition, and appear in a text that is, for several reasons, politically suspect, inconsistent and conservative, would probably be considered unreasonably severe. Is it OK to say there is at least a publication that pays attention to the youth of Southall? Such a publication, given the reluctance of the publishing and cultural studies industry up until very recently to even acknowledge such communities as anything other than subjects for racism studies, could be declared good news. This is a study that takes up recent theoretical insights into themes like cultural hybridity and is not afraid to suggest there are differences amongst the Asian communities. There *are* too few studies. Marie Gillespie has offered us an extended and potentially exciting project – except that it really is inconsistent, conservative and suspect.

Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change offers some useful insights and raises for discussion a host of crucial questions in the areas of identity, ethnicity and the media. Youth aspirations are taken seriously in a way that is frequently missing in other texts. The sense that the youth of Southall could have authored such a book themselves, and are at least represented here, does come across. Further, there are numerous points made that deserve discussion, and an assortment of asides, allusions and passing references that show there is

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depth to this area and the author does not claim to have covered all. (Indeed, at least twice she refers to planned further analysis of her research data, one projected work on 'family life' [p. 63], another on teacher–student talk [p. 66]). The work could fruitfully lead to wider comparative studies of television and its impacts, its role in the various communities of Britain, and its potential counter-hegemonic uses. This is a welcome book for pointing towards such potentials.

But what I find most striking about this study is what it does not say. I expected a more politically charged book on Southall. I didn't, for example, expect such a tight focus on family. In this the book is distinct. The study is avowedly not about media high-profile 'exemplars' but takes as its subject the 'private lives' of Punjabis in Southall. These private lives are the site of transcultural experiences from which 'pluralist, hybrid cultural forms of expression are being wrought' (p. 6). Words such as 'hybrid' and 'transcultural' signify a theoretical trend in thinking about, among other matters, Black political culture in Britain (Bhabha, 1988; Gilroy, 1987, 1993a, 1993b; Hall, 1989, 1995; Spivak, 1993). While Gillespie's ethnography is not a complete failure since it at least offers room for these questions, the focus on family and on television uncritically as a medium simply there, makes her comments about transcultural experiences, from which emerge pluralist and hybrid expression, somewhat strange. In a space where transcultural expression also plays havoc with easy notions of family and media, there can be no avoidance of the ongoing questioning of these terms and their oftentimes eurocentric focus. Yet it appears that Gillespie also wants to avoid any theoretically sophisticated and privileged 'view from above' positions of high theory diaspora and hybridity-talk, in favour of getting on with the survey, after making a distinction between 'Afro-Caribbean' and 'Asian', and attending to the particulars of the post-migration experiences of the latter. Attention to particularity in a context of hybridity in itself raises interesting questions about the politics of identity and the drawing of distinctions across political alliances (though it is not at all clear that the Southall youth of her study make the distinction in the same way). But here, a foreshortened notion of hybridity reifies where it might otherwise have been revealing. While some Black activists and researchers have also pointed to a neglect of studies of Asian experience in the context of the Asian diaspora, it has also become popular among sections of the identity politics establishment to deploy a distinction (saying Black is hybrid) to immobilize militant Black politicization in favour of a cultural and even merely aesthetic understanding of multiplicity. Such is the conservative politics of television audience studies.

The focus on media audiences leads to some curious assertions that cannot be simply attributed to the 'viewers themselves'. In the book Gillespie alludes to the film *Wild West* (a recent film about a Southall-based Punjabi band playing country and western music and looking to Nashville for success) as well

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as to survey results which show America (i.e. North America) to be the place most youth said they would like to visit (Australia was second). It is difficult to judge whether or not this interest in America can be mobilized in any straightforward way to explain names like that of the musician 'Apache Indian'. The name 'Apache Indian', Gillespie suggests, can be explained in terms of a sort of double pun which appropriates Native American imagery alongside a subcontinental affirmation. This is then to both 'assimilate to the "West" on terms at least partly of one's own making' (p. 5), and simultaneously to circumvent 'an uncomfortable political, imperial history of strife and hatred, as well as a culture of absolute "oriental" difference'. If it is assimilation that is at stake however, then discomforting politics seems to be sliding out of focus in ways that should be more carefully examined. It is uncertain who holds this view – the Southall youth Gillespie surveyed, the makers of the film *Wild West*, Apache Indian? – and in any case, the point is that such explanations are never simply there, but are contingent upon many things. Instead of opening up these questions, Gillespie's take on hybridity closes in on a traditionalism which holds that by looking to America, the youth in *Wild West* 'remain true to the culture of their parents' (p. 5), as well as also wanting to circumvent the uncomfortable history of imperialism (Said notwithstanding, something very strange is going on which demands a deeper political analysis).

From the cover collage, which does not credit the collaged photographs, to the surveillance themes that run throughout, this book is one which continually raises questions of appropriation and imagery. The jacket design by Keenan takes a photograph from the magazine *Ghazal and Beat* and crops the inner urban car-yard context to use only the turbaned image of a Sikh youth. This cropped and decontextualized image is then used by Routledge in its catalogue as a marginal illustration and on the book cover as exotic icon in ways not intended by the photographer (for the record, Amarjit Phull). Whatever the innocence of intentions, the cropping removes the youth from British realities and places him in an exotic space where South Asia exists as a site of difference, mystery, exotica and intrigue (for further discussions of such mechanisms see Hutnyk, 1996; Sharma et al., 1996).

Appropriation of imagery operates at several levels in the book. For good and bad. Gillespie taught school in Southall for many years and throughout the period of her formal research. This positioning provides opportunities and insights that would be otherwise unavailable to a white (*gora*) researcher. That she is the only teacher allowed into the sixth form common room ('sympathy, empathy or whatever, eventually allowed me free access to ... strictly peer territory' [p. 70]), where her pool-playing left something to be desired, also affords much of the background knowledge that makes up this book. Although Gillespie provides some detail on the positioning of herself as researcher in such a situation, and relates the complexities of her position of

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some authority as schoolteacher contrasted with the trust granted her through close association and camaraderie by her informants, the implications of this complexity are not pursued.

In the first instance Gillespie's text is not interesting because of her contemplation and anxiety over the ethnographic method (in any case most of the 'results' are interpreted survey returns; and her anxiety over the 'abuse of power' relegating teaching responsibilities in favour of research [p. 69] is one apology too many), nor because of her choices to investigate Asian attitudes to Coca-Cola or to the soap opera *Neighbours*.[1] Rather, what is interesting is the extent to which she pays attention to political issues, or not, and the status of what she calls the 'subversive' aspects of youth behaviour. In the context of an obviously heightened media-literate research scene this demands an evaluation. It might not be overly generous to think that for all the work Gillespie has done on TV and media reception, her unhip attitude is unique (and refreshing – there are far too many too cool cultural studies personnel). Less appealing is her behaviourist (p. 67), or at least objectivist – 'distanced' – stance (the 'effects of the researcher' were to be 'monitored and so brought under control as far as possible' [p. 67]); and her surveillance work comes across as unremittingly shameless (as teacher her good-cop/bad-cop role was perhaps unavoidable – there were things which 'should have been reported to the school authorities' [p. 71]). Her avowals that the youth resist the 'gossip' and censure of parents and community by slipping off to McDonalds or watching TV without the folks are only the surface reports of a research project that trades so much in gossip that I find it implausible that it is so blasé about its own authority claims. This too in a text that cites Clifford and Marcus several times. In the 1990s. In England.

So, the discussion in *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* might have been more successful if the implications of reading Hall and Gilroy in the first chapter had informed the fieldwork. Instead of a critical approach to the concepts of hybridity, diaspora and post-colonialism (as well as acknowledgement of the requisite mantras: 'translated cultural identities are the inevitable consequence of the simultaneous globalisation of media communications and growth of migrant and transnational diasporic communities' [p. 19]), there is a routine survey-based empirical study which ultimately only delivers an ethnographic report. There is no sense in which the implications of these transnational diasporic hybrid communication environments will disrupt received social science observation models. Although these transnational media and the 'globalization of culture' (p. 7) are implicated in a process where 'ever more sophisticated international communications technologies and the products of transnational media corporations dissolve distance and suspend time' (p. 7), there is not, in this book, any disruption of an ethnographic project that requires particular, not global, essentialized, although hybrid, traditional, although translated, ethnic categories to proceed. Gillespie may say that all

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cultures are 'hybrid, syncretic, creolized or impure . . . reified' (p. 4) but she both asserts that her method is quite different from those that take up such themes, and she never leaves go of a notion of culture, which though it changes, is still an unexamined hold-all category doing work for time-honoured anthropological simplicities.

Gillespie, even after reading contemporary culture theory, activates quite conservative formulations of gender, ethnicity and tradition which, to appropriate Susie Tharu's felicitous phrase, 'has shed none of its rural/ethnic colour' (Tharu, 1994: 86) despite being imported to ethnography in the metropole. Gillespie's version of Asians in London sifts out immature rebellion as selfish in favour of more mature 'traditional' continuities. Coupled with the invisibility of political Southall, this choice for an albeit hybridized and modified reaffirmation of the parental values can be accorded as much correspondence with the real as can any other cultural product. All the old political questions of ideology and perspective apply. But somehow, and miraculously, ethnography will allow the researcher to 'bear witness' (p. 74) to the hybrid experience of Southall youth, so as to 'capture' subversive social critique and change. Hardly.

Combining a hotchpotch of Malinowski, Geertzian thickness of description, and gestures towards a dialogical plural authorship, after Clifford and Marcus (pp. 54–5), Gillespie contrives to avoid the 'ethnographers' *alleged* insensitivity to their political relations with those they study' (pp. 74–5). I have italicized a very significant *alleged* here, which works in negation of insensitivity, as if all along anthropologists really were sensible of the politics of what they were doing. The famous advocate of participant-observation in fieldwork, Malinowski, is deployed to defend the survey approach, and is quoted on the method: 'In survey work we are given an excellent skeleton, so to speak, of tribal constitution' (p. 52). The criticisms of questionnaire work that can be made are that they are unhelpful in assessing meanings, subjectivity, the unexpected, and varieties of interpretation of the questions by the questioned, as well as being unable, because of a survey's 'focus upon taxonomic groups, to take account of casual groupings, relationships and alliances' (p. 53). Gillespie claims that many of such difficulties can be overcome with an adequately designed, conceptualized, theorized, piloted and managed survey *combined* with qualitative work forming a wider ethnographic approach (p. 53). She is perhaps right to want to rehabilitate survey work (there is nothing *intrinsically* wrong with counting). Students from Brunel University helped with the analysis of the survey data (p. 51) and part of the survey is presented as an appendix to the book (pp. 210–20), but up until the fourth chapter there is limited evidence of the survey being supplemented by much of an 'ethnographic approach' beyond sitting watching TV some weekends. This, of course, is a petty criticism of the book, but is worth noting as so often it is cultural studies advocates rather than anthropologists who claim, and are

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mocked for claiming, that watching TV can *really* be research. Whatever. In her discussions of ethnography, Gillespie becomes confusing when she makes an otherwise valid criticism of Clifford, after Roth, to the effect that 'stylised self reflection' is no solution to the concern with representation of others as a form of domination. Such stylistic concerns – of a very North American anthropology type – are doomed to fail because they do not address practical questions about validation and responsibility (p. 75). But unfortunately it is exactly here that she breaks off, with the words 'anthropology as an academic discipline relies on the goodwill of people to reveal themselves and be revealed. In this sense it becomes too crude to talk about methods or ethnographic authority, and more fruitful to talk of ethnographic responsibility' (p. 75). Gillespie does not return to this talk anywhere else in the book.

Instead, we could talk about the responsibilities of TV. A major focus of the book is upon the role of television in the lives of Punjabi families. Gillespie's analysis of watching both the Government of India television, Doordarshan, and the European Peter Brook versions of the *Mahabharata* with one Southall family, as well as an extended consideration of the Australian (made for England) soap *Neighbours*, has much in common with cultural studies approaches like that of Ang (*Watching Dallas*). From the local site of the living room to the global transmissions of these transnational broadcasts there is a difficult, but inextricably connected, study area. Media studies, however, has been inadequate to its potential. Gillespie rightly points out that much of the money spent on television research has been a waste – and it is a lot of money, more than any other area of social science research (p. 53, after Lodziac) – although I am not convinced that the shift from 'a focus on the political and ideological role of TV to an examination of popular pleasures and audience interpretations in specific social and cultural contexts' is necessarily all that great or discontinuous a shift. Much context-specific TV study is highly political/ideological: the work of Eric Michaels on the Aboriginal 'invention' of television in central Australia would be a good example. Nor is it a bargain. In any case, there is not only a middle ground to be steered between excessive textuality and excess socio-ideological studies of TV. There are, as always, other angles to take.

Gillespie does a lot of television work: she teaches media studies to her 'informants' for starters; she, with their consent of course, puts their viewing habits under surveillance; her questions and interest appeals to the youth by taking their views seriously, by showing interest; she makes extensive use 'of the video camera for teaching and research' (p. 63); and she is called upon to videotape weddings, religious ceremonies and messages or video-letters to be sent back to India. That she claims her recordings as significant 'anthropological documents of family life' (p. 63) might suggest that the documentation of any family event anywhere is of this status. Or is it that Asian families in Southall are of greater anthropological significance than say, the Irish

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community in Liverpool, or the Australian expats in Earls Court? (Compare that to *Neighbours*!) Surely these groups have extensive camcorder archives as well, and so must also be considered 'significant'? The question is not whether these films are worthy or not, nor whether Gillespie has a right to take them or not (she was obviously asked, and she had a camera which people saw a use for), the point is rather why is it important to write about these things? What is the point of telling us that Asian families discuss advertisements or debate the narratives and meanings of soap opera, just as every other family in Britain probably does? Why be more interested in TV in minority communities than elsewhere? Is it the subversive use made of TV that justifies this invasive public display of events in the Dhani family's living room? Is it that video among Asian families is 'a means of recreating cultural traditions' (p. 78) – even though the youth will find ways to 'subvert' this? Is it that the cultural codes through which the Dhanis watch and interpret television, such as Brook's *Mahabharata*, which they disliked (p. 91), are so noticeably different and unique? Is it that only with a minority Asian family such as the Dhanis does it become possible for the anthropologist to examine the sense of wonderment that is seen in the 'tribal' (Malinowski) person bowing down before a deity? Gillespie seems to be impressed as the Dhanis watch the *Bhagavad Gita* section where Krishna reveals his universal form to Arjuna in the Doordarshan *Mahabharat*. She describes: 'The sheer awe with which this sequence was viewed by the family was as remarkable as the images on the screen. . . . It is as if Krishna makes an appearance in the living-room' (p. 95). What then, I wonder, would Gillespie make of Manchester United fans watching Giggs or Cantona on the TV replay? Would such research be funded? Would Routledge publish?

Why I think this text offers an opportunity to raise some pressing political questions about research and the media is that it covers a subject area that numerous other researchers might like to explore. The project would seem a good idea to many. Fun even. Presently it is becoming clear that Media and Asian youth are very topical themes. There is much that could be developed. Although she eschews a cultural studies approach Gillespie does offer an interesting story, she has some obvious and considerable skills as a field-worker, and has spent a substantial time getting to know her 'informants'. Unfortunately the kind of anthropology she does is dead. Should be dead, ought to be dead . . . alas. To add insult to injury, the resuscitation of gross survey methods and fat generalizations from prefigured questions provides a more and more muddied masala. What, for example, does it mean to discover that 'most young people find that religious sectarianism, rather than racism, is the most disturbing aspect of local life' (p. 120)? This is particularly curious when 55 percent of 186 surveyed ticked religion as a dividing factor between youth in Southall while *only* 47 percent ticked racism (p. 212), a difference of less than 8 percent or 17 persons. In a locality where allegedly 'racism is not an

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everyday reality for people in Southall, as it is for, say, Bengalis in Tower Hamlets' (p. 120), a 47 percent to 55 percent split out of 186 must be very hard to interpret. But I am not interested in enumerating the possible complicating factors that could skew such results, the point is that as so much of this book is based on survey results, however adequately supplemented by watching television, it seems a little difficult to accept the story. Given that Southall has a well-known political history, it is strange that the community, and even its 16-year-old youth – of whom, to be fair, few 'had any knowledge of the dramatic events' (p. 120) – could be written of in such detail and yet with only a few pages mentioning anti-racism campaigns.

Within the book the discussion of Southall and anti-racism is quite brief, but fits into the more general aversion to radical politics that is endemic in the UK and especially in what previously might have been a potentially more critical field of endeavour. Politics in a wider sense gets even shorter shrift: a page on the poll tax, two pages on Khalistan – while in contrast Christmas is allocated six. That Gillespie as teacher with seemingly non-conventional commitments (after all she chose to work in Southall in 1980, at a time when Southall was highly politicized, and this was at least apparent in the mainstream press) can go so far as to conceive of Apache Indian as some kind of radical, and is content to present the views of a small group of 16-year-olds as indicative of a political current – largely 'safe', tending towards conservative – suggests much about the limitations of the political climate today. Is it that political agency has regressed and that to offer a radical politics that challenges anything is now far too difficult, or is it that the researcher can't see further political implications of research because of the constraints of her institutional affiliations (as teacher and as anthropologist)? Surely a study based in Southall ten years previously couldn't have been so apolitical? Crucial contestations around racism are still today a part of British left and academic sociological activity, yet it is the Christmas festival which fascinates Gillespie. There are those who propose a quite different view of Southall. It is the contest and criticism of organizations like Southall Monitoring Group, Southall Black Sisters and the Indian Workers' Association that were the significant players in Gerd Baumann's conference presentation of material from the same research project (ICCCR 'Negotiating Multi-ethnic Alliances' conference, Manchester, December 1994).[2] On the issue of Apache Indian as 'subversive' (p. 47), the proffered evidence is that his Bhangra-Reggae crossover styles 'present forceful social critiques of issues from drugs to AIDS to the dowry system . . . allow[ing] for an assimilation of the values of urban British youth culture in combination with a continued attachment to the values shared with parents and rooted in the subcontinent' (p. 46). (A repeat of the *Wild West* formulation from p. 5). There are many who would contest the 'force' of Apache Indian's social critique, pointing instead to a commercialism and an opportunism that is not very radical at all. 'Assimilation' – a term now used twice – to British values offered

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without regard to the politics of assimilation as a form of racism is only made more significant when Gillespie immediately then takes the work of Apache Indian as 'powerful testimony' to a dynamic culture 'responsive to the social world' (p. 47), and links this directly to 'questions of ethnographic fieldwork and the potential it offers for *capturing* such processes of cultural change' (p. 47, my italics). This is a standard form of thinking in ethnicist anthropology, always referring Asian cultural production, whatever it is and wherever it is in the world, back to benchmark values 'rooted in the subcontinent' (here embodied as the unchanging parents) – or rather in a forever-inscribed (Dumont-ian) anthropological version of caste, tribe, village and family, which is wholly inadequate for India today or for any notion of diasporic Asians.

However much Gillespie likes Apache Indian he couldn't be the be all and end all of South Asian politics, so a major question to be asked about this research project must be: why this occlusion of the politics of Southall? Is it a correlate of the Thatcherite closure of political aspirations in Britain, now manifest in minority communities? Or is it a correlate of the researcher's position, the choice of subject matter – are all 16-year-olds apolitical today? The researcher proclaims a 'progressive critical distancing' which is said to overcome the problem of identification and projecting 'one's own concerns onto them', rather than 'studying them' (p. 50). What, in this context, is the purpose of study? An ungenerous – even critically distanced – evaluation might raise questions about how such texts work as a blockage of political questioning. The few pages devoted to discussion of racism might be acceptable if the text were not charged with other agendas that can be discerned in a more systematically old-style anthropological project. It may be true, and it certainly is interesting, that Gillespie's informants expressed to her their feeling that 'it's always the same issue, racism, that's what gets people up in arms, they've made it into a huge media event' (p. 127, quoting informant Navdeep, name possibly changed). But what is the purpose of this quotation, which, if we were to expand the quote just a few more words, would also provide support for Gillespie's contention that religion was a more serious issue in Southall? Who does 'Navdeep' speak for here in Gillespie's book? All of Southall? All 16-year-olds? Or, if we remember that anthropology is ventriloquy, Gillespie herself, since it is she who chooses to quote this quote at this place and time? It is also not coincidental that this quotation comes amidst a revealingly structured discussion of the racist murder of Kuldip Sekhon. It is worth attending to the structure and language of social science reportage of this type.

The discussion hinges on a double-barrelled pattern. What this means is that the examples which support the discussion duplicate a pattern in the paragraphs arranged either side of the quotation. I want to argue that this is not coincidental because it is clearly carefully planned and persuasive. This can be shown by a focus upon the words *most*, *many* and *two*, in the context of a study

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based in large part on survey results. The first paragraph of p.126 begins with the assertion that '*Most* young people were ambivalent about the alleged racist motives behind the murder' [of Kuldip Sekhon]; while '*Some* agreed that racism may have been an element' (p. 126); '*many* argued that his murder should not be exploited by Southall Monitoring Group for political purposes'; yet, 'Whilst this was the dominant view, there was a group of sixth-formers who became actively involved in the campaign' (p. 126). (Were these the same pool-playing sixth-formers from the common room to which Gillespie was privy?) The next paragraph follows the same pattern: *most* thought it was just a murder; *many* pointed to other non-racialized examples; '*Most* young people remained sceptical or ambivalent about the racist motivation behind the murder' (p. 126), as an exchange between *two* 16-year-old boys 'demonstrates'. There then comes the quotation from Navdeep. The following paragraph again begins with a *many*. Then: '*some* used the situation to vent their feelings about racism, [while] *most* recoiled from the vociferousness of adult campaigners' (p. 127). The point is that the terms *most* and *many* are reserved to describe the majority but the evidence of this majority is always only *two*. Against the general force of *most* and *many*, the more restricted *some* is used and diminishes the contrary viewpoint. Are these terms innocent?[3] An exchange between *two* 16-year-olds 'highlights a common pattern of response' (p. 127). I will skip the short exchange, since of course dialogues must be between two (and the recording researcher makes three). Towards the end of the passage Gillespie sums up with the sentence: 'I have tried to present a *pattern* of response among many young people' (p. 127) and this is seen to be an articulation of their own positions in the face of the point of view of their elders. Their reactions, she adds, may also be 'explained by the very real fear of confronting not only the idea but the possible reality of racist murder' (p. 127).

Racist murder is more than a 'possible reality', it is a real possibility – although perhaps it is for reasons of legal protocol that Gillespie reports that 'To this day the central question . . . [was it a racist murder?] . . . remains unanswered' (p. 127). Police and the courts found no evidence that it was a racially motivated murder, although Gillespie quotes reports that Stephen Croker (the murderer) had told his girlfriend he was going to kill a Paki, that he was a member of the National Front, that he had a previous conviction for assault of an Asian youth and that he had been in trouble for smashing Asian shop windows (pp. 126–8). I suppose this is circumstantial evidence in legal terms, but also persuasive in the context of Gillespie's presentation if the reader looks beyond her actual descriptive words – *alleged* racism, *unanswered* questions. The point here is not to question Gillespie's data, but to ask why the presentation works in this way. Why reproduce the hesitant, politically naive, cautionary and confused opinions of the many – well, at least two – Southall youth who hold such safe views, who would '*mostly* prefer to believe' they could live in a 'Britain unmarred by racism' (p. 128)? Wouldn't the responsibility of a teacher, and even an anthropologist,

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be to disabuse people of such views, or must all political engagement be evaded? Gillespie takes refuge in the role of the distanced researcher despite evidence that she sees the murder of Kuldip Sekhon as racist. In this case she did not project. Elsewhere a revealing statement alibis this abstention:

> *Mostly* I did as little talking as I could get away with, being intent . . . on elaborating informants' meanings. Informants' perceptions are seldom reliably or fully delivered by straightforward questioning, and one cannot seek easy answers to research questions by directly probing informants. More oblique, subtle and even obtuse methods are required. (p. 66)

To conclude, there are some parallels to be drawn. The micro-political thematics of Gillespie's book turn on questions that have also been seen by some to have dominated British South Asian film-making in recent years – those of sexuality, generational conflict/closeness (especially marked in TV or video it seems, at least in *Wild West* and *Bhaji*) and cross-community liaisons. There is a parallel with the interests of social science research in such themes – including theory talk about hybridity – and this should not be thought of as coincidental or circumstantial. Much of Gillespie's research appears to have involved the revelation of 'gossip' in situations of trust and confidence, which included information about these liaisons, as well as other petty transgressions. Is it the role of the social sciences to investigate and report these secrets, or are there less moralistic tasks that might be undertaken? The decline of 'politics' in favour of gesture and identity works its effects here too. Much of the surveillance and the 'subversion' aspects of Gillespie's book dealt with relationships and westernization couched in the register of sexuality. But unfortunately it's not even that sexy. . . . As a study of media and television it does not carry the groovy tones of so much cultural studies, yet it is somewhat tired in its anthropological and survey conventions. As a political text it is a non-event, in a context where some political engagement would seem a requirement: Kuldip Sekhon gives way to *Neighbours* – perhaps the book should carry a warning sticker on the front. On the whole it is a good illustration of the difficult and precarious state of anthropology. While we should generously be pleased that it has been published, if this is the state of media studies anthropology in Britain, we may have been better off if it had not.

NOTES

1. I've always found it weird that *Neighbours* does so well in the UK since it is considered loathsome by most Australians I know. As a source of British understanding of Australian life it is a joke, but that Gillespie sees it as the source of most Southall youth's understanding of white people is still more complicated.

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2. According to a footnote this is the subject of his companion volume to Gillespie's ethnography: *Contesting Culture: Discourses of 'Culture' and 'Community' in Multi-ethnic London* (forthcoming). The focus of Baumann's book possibly accounts for a division of labour which has Gillespie doing Christmas, him doing politics. Is this innocent?
3. A secondary question of interpretation could be asked here in the context of a study that keeps on reminding us that Southall youth often attempt to 'subvert' and evade parental interests and values. The 'venting' and 'recoiling' motions – fort/da – of generational difference are never simple. What mechanisms come into play where teenagers are also likely to 'subvert and evade' the teacher-author-anthropologist? Should we assume everything is transparent here?

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