J. G. Ballard's (Sub)Urban Landscapes

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I, Chan Du, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract (300)

This thesis on J. G. Ballard's (sub)urban places is situated in literary geography and has a double fucus on literature and geography. Comparing Ballard's backward-looking posture to that of Walter Benjamin, I situate his work in the twilight zone after photography's theoretical mode has, as Rosalind Krauss argues, brought about the wholesale transformation of modern art. I read his hero as an artist-worker-bricoleur, reappropriating forms, reinventing places, and recreating mythologies, in a post-utopia, post-industrial, post-medium landscape. I argue that Ballard's in-betweenness, as problematized in Ballard criticism, urges us to rethink a set of historical categories and paradigms. Using an invented medium that interacts with a wide range of world-building and myth-making cultural forms, his collection of work, on the one hand, maps out a circular topology, 'bivalent' structure, twinned impulses, and a unified suburban posture in major art, political vanguardism of the twentieth century. On the other hand, his work illuminates the forms, topologies, rhythms in a series of (sub)urban places and communities organized around infrastructures. These places, drawing on the constructivist methods and visual techniques of modern art, rely on apocalyptic moments of disrupted mobility. As bounded networks, they are embedded within structures with heightened forms of ordering. Dramatizing the constructed nature of the built environment and unveiling the poetic dimension in urban infrastructures, his work debunks the myth of the non-place/heterotopia that continues to draw on avant-garde rhetorics and opens culture to alternative ways of ordering. Reconceptualizing forms in a time when modernism/formalism/avant-gardism is both dead and alive, this thesis proposes to rethink the relation between art and reality, history and poetics.

Impact Statement (500)

Our built environment is a twilight zone of mixed hope and crisis. On the one hand, we have urban sprawl, mass suburbanization and an expanding global network where labor, material and space circulate in an ever more flexible network. On the other hand, these increasingly virtual and free-flowing zones are underpinned by immobility and hierarchical frigidity.

With an interdisciplinary method at the intersection between literature, geography, literary criticism and urban studies, my thesis aims to impact the way we conceptualize forms, both aesthetic forms and material, social forms. As the line between academic research and social reality is blurring, my thesis actively seeks to bring a formal language to participate in the making of a shifting urban landscape. It uses the apocalyptic mode as a revisionist device to chart urban topologies and draw out their implications. In this sense, it shows the infrastructural basis of urban life and articulates its political unconscious.

The potential impact of this thesis lies in the following dimensions of illumination, action and imagination.

(1) Illumination. The thesis illuminates the ideologies and mythologies constructed in (sub)urban imageries. It debunks the notion of formlessness, emptiness and openness that tend to guide our renovation of peripheral locations and urges urban planners to consider: where are borders of the proclaimed free zone? Who do we include and exclude?

(2) Action. Illuminating the discontinuous nature of urban development and amplifying the poetic nature of urban infrastructures, the thesis prompts heterogeneous users and dwellers of urban space to 'bricolage' place into being, rather than feeling intimidated by seemingly impervious urban structures and large-scaled social transitions.

(3) Imagination. The thesis proposes future urban places should function between the virtual and actual. The thesis calls on urban dwellers as well as planners to integrate a place's past, ongoing crisis in the present, and possible future metamorphosis into a wholistic understanding of what a place really means.

To actualize these impacts, this thesis, in its later formative stage, has given birth to a new architectural project in UCL east campus located in the Olympic Park in East London. In collaboration with architect/artist Timothy Percival and Professor Gregory Thompson from UCL

Anthropology, I will bring the insights and findings of this thesis to exploring the liminal spaces in Marshgate building and its surrounding areas in a public event this December. The project gives an open call to the frequent users and one-time visitors of the building to express their relation to the place through multiple media forms. Collecting these data, we will present them in a way that contrasts Mythology with Secret, how spaces should be used with how they are experienced. The project, together with this thesis, will impact the way we think about multiple scales and forms of urban experience and imagine possibilities of intervention.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr. James Graham Ballard. I've never met him but wherever I go, I can never unsee what he's enabled me to see.

Like his hero, I've started this thesis driven by an impulse unknown to myself. I started this journey from the University of York, which was a huge suburb to me. I remember feeling suffocated there and went on endless tango trips to continental Europe. Stranded in China for two years during the pandemic, I finally ended up in UCL, London's Global University. It was everything opposite to York and provided all the excitements and novelty I thought I needed. A watershed moment for me was going to an international conference held in a small suburban town called Corsham in Bath on crime fiction. When everyone was excited to explore the undiscovered cultural corners in a sort of treasure hunting game, throwing about words such as multiculturalism and polycentrism, I couldn't relate to that revolutionary rigor. Despite the liberatory and transgressive tone in the enterprise, I found the discourse of diversity paradoxically totalizing. The way that margins, minorities, and differences were defined against the mainstream falls into a frustratingly restrictive parameter, which tends to confine research in suburban corners.

When the crew went sightseeing in the archaeological sites in the city centre of Bath, I wandered through a huge car park to a canal overlooked by a row of houses on the other side of the river. Then I had my Ballardian moment. The banal land/waterscape around me suddenly froze into a vivid frame and then broke into geometric patterns and color blocks of infinite richness. Two hot air balloons - first a white one and a couple of seconds later a black one – occurred from the branches and slowly drifted across the sky, in the most otherworldly, awe-striking manner. At hindsight the scene was suggestive of the higher meaning that could emerge out of oppositions and contradictions. Since then, I've started to look for meaning in the oppositional readings of Ballard, and in the dialectic unity between stasis and mobility, liberation and entrapment.

I would like to thank many people here. Professor Hugh Haughton and Dr. Daryl Martin read my work and gave me much faith when my PhD study at the University of York was not

going particularly well. They convinced me that the question of 'what is a place' might not be so 'out of place' in an English department that was supposed to be more concerned with 'what is a text'. Thanks to their help and reference, I got to know my current supervisor, Dr. James Kneale, who 'adopted' me from York and found me a home at SELCS, UCL. Inspired by James's expertise in literary geography, I undertook the current project that attempts to synthesize the interest in the place and the text. During his supervision, James has always engaged with my work in great depth, pushed me to be critical of what I read, and pointed me to useful directions where I could both run into rabbit holes and have a road map to follow. With a big heart, James volunteered to help in the SELCS conference I organized and invited me to share intimate moments with his fellow geographers in a memorial lecture. The other supervisor of mine, Professor Jakob Stougaard-Neilsen, has always been enormously supportive and most responsibly and carefully guided me through the important procedures in accomplishing this thesis. He introduced me to thinkers like Caroline Levine and inspired me to think about forms in very different ways. I will always remember the long conversations with the two of them, our day trip to Kingston, our afternoon teas and family meals joined by the delightful Mr. Oliver Eccles, who has always believed in me much more than I believed in myself.

There are other scholars who have indirectly but significantly impacted me in my PhD journey. Dr. Tim Beasley-Murray from the Arts and Humanities at UCL, who I had the privilege to work with, has been a huge source of inspiration. He made me think about humanities research as a 'game', a game that calls for full dedication and a game in and through which one becomes oneself. 'Just be you.' He once said to me. The dialectical thinking and comparative lens in his monograph on Benjamin and Bakhtin have also informed the methodology of this thesis. Working on the BACAH programme with Tim and Prof. Gregory Thompson has been a transformative experience and has informed the case study of Marshgate in the conclusion of the thesis. The dialectical contrast between the two of them has enlightened me to think about the twinned impulses of the avant-garde and its resonances in contemporary times. Prof. Johannes Riquet from Tampere University has been a great friend, the best cook, the most patient editor of my paper and the most knowledgeable guide to mobilities research. These amazing academics have all profoundly shaped the way I developed my thinking and writing in the past four years.

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Messiahs always emerge from the desert, everybody will be waiting for him, and he'll seize his chance.

– J. G. Ballard

Introduction: Ballard and Suburbia

The magazine that tells you what's on and where to go in London.
November 2-8 1979 No.498 35p

Time Out

Semi-detached dreams.
J.G.Ballard and the science-fiction of the ordinary.
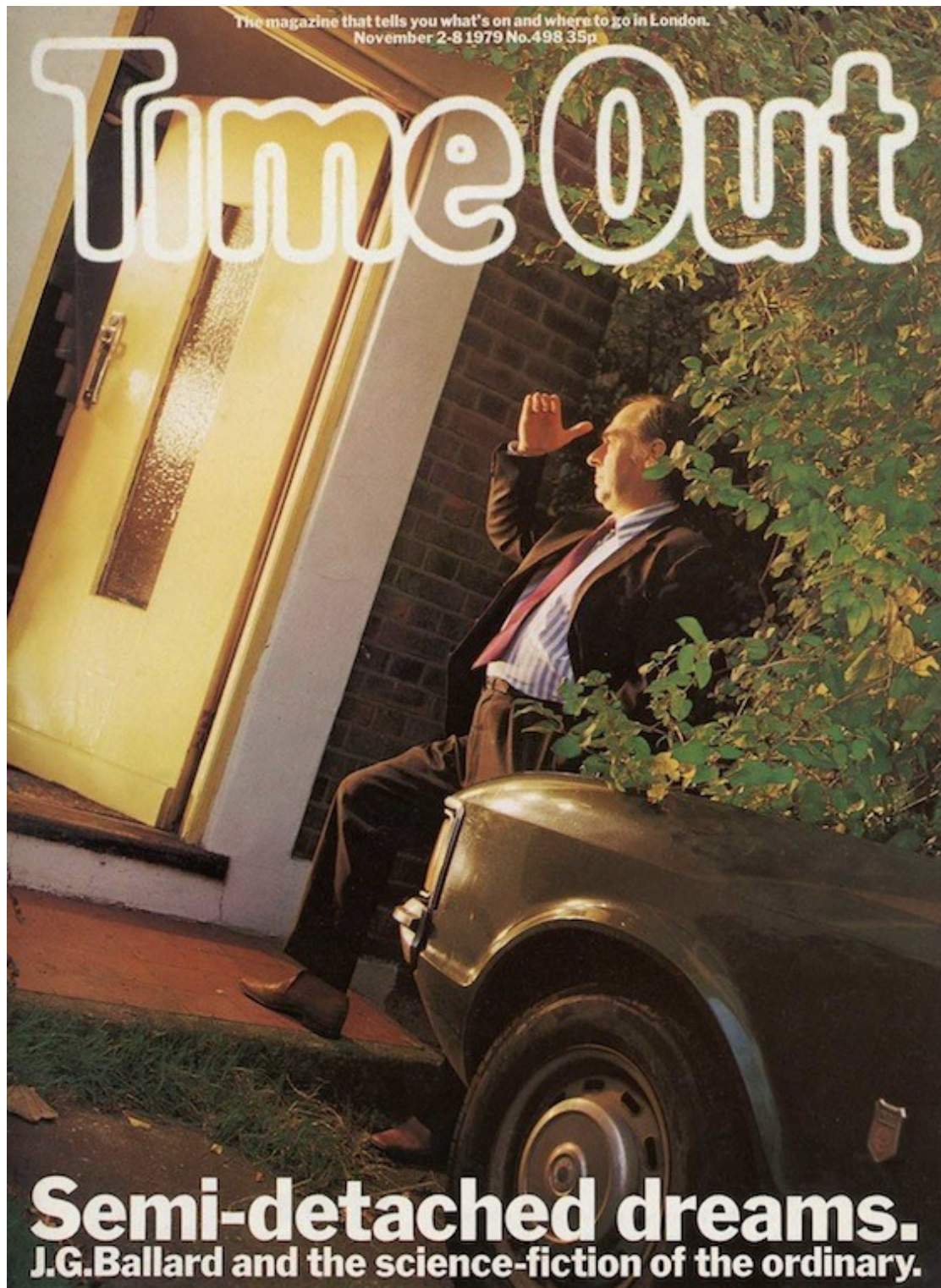
J. G. Ballard in Shepperton, by Brian Griffin (1979)

1. Research Context

Ballard's posture

If we were to condense J. G. Ballard, a writer with many hats, surrealism, pop art, science fiction, crime fiction, apocalyptic fiction into one mental image, it would be a suburban sage in a stylish posture looking into the future. Ballard's hallmark posture is captured in this photo made by British photographer Brian Griffin who photographed Ballard twice, the first time in 1979 for the *Time Out* magazine and the second time in 1988 for *The Face* magazine. Ballard, standing on the threshold between his suburban house and his car, two recurrent tropes in his work, is showered in a strong light pouring out from his home, as if perusing the post-war media and technological landscape with a cold, clinical eye, and an uncompromisingly defiant posture. Upon scrutiny, however, Ballard's posture seems flat and contrived, somewhat mannequin-like, as if merely performing, acting, impersonating the role of a 'seer of Shepperton'. Ballard's house is unkempt and out of place against an immaculate neighbourhood. Both the house and the car look as if they are going to be eaten by ivy. The 'futurist' light pours on his face, and his hand gesture is both inviting and resistant. The photo sums up a set of questions that are also crucial in reading Ballard's deeply troubling work: Why does the prophet appear flattened and confined in this portrait? Why is he looking back at his home rather than forward towards the outside? Why is the luminous scene eerie and unsettling? Why is the future associated with the primitive?

The two experiences of photographing Ballard Griffin recounts in an article published in his biographical album *Black Country Dada* (2021) are not altogether pleasant. Ballard deliberately engages his guests in a perverse mental game of chess, each speaking of an idea which is then rejected by the other. Eventually Griffin gives in and 'just wanted to get out of that house' (Griffin, 2021, p152). Griffin's assistant, John Lorigan, who is accompanying Griffin in the second shooting observes that, with an original of Belgian surrealist Paul Delvaux's painting by the fireplace in his living room, Ballard's house is arranged in such a way to evoke a mood of unease, to which both his guest and himself are subjected:

> The house gave me the impression that he used it as a space to 'create, to get in the
> zone' but he had a nice place somewhere else. I was struck also by the feeling that he

was playing a game, he was subtly challenging Brian to see if he was a match for his intellect. I did not feel at ease in his house. I think that was the mood he was trying to evoke; he didn't appear to be at ease in his own house either (Griffin, 2021, p152).

Ballard's suburban house creates an effect that affects both himself and his guests; his work also creates an effect to which both his heroes, his reader and the author are subjected. As Sam Leith remarks (cited in Griffin, 2021, p152), the suburb has 'proximity to those in-between places, such as airports and orbital roads, in which [Ballard] thrived'. 'A seer from Shepperton', Ballard is, like his hero, willingly trapped in his bland suburban home and has written most of his works there. Remaining an 'outsider' to the British society which he compares to an immense suburb, the poet critical of suburbia is also a poet thriving in it. In a typical Ballard story, an apocalyptic vision transforms the non-descript, transitory technological place, a motorway or a traffic island, into a primitive site that is both paradisal and hellish. Both mesmerized and repelled, his characters unconsciously and repeatedly chart these terrains. Challenging the affectless media landscape, they are themselves photographers, TV executives, video editors, and mental patients indulged in solipsistic games. Confused by the undecidedness, his reader is also caught in compulsive rereading. While some are fascinated, some are abhorred. While some marvel at his original and unmistakable voice, some find him unbearably repetitive.

In Ballard criticism, the modernist Ballard and the postmodernist Ballard coexist in one stylish posture. The modernist Ballard is innovative and transgressive. Tracing the legacy of surrealism in Ballard's work, Jeannette Baxter (2009, p3) reads Ballard's work as a 'spectacular authorship' that is influenced by the historical avant-gardes and the neo-avant-garde Independent Group, Pop Art and the Situationist International. His text is a 'place of encounter open to all possibilities' (Baxter, 2009, p3). Using surrealist techniques of collage and defamiliarization to mobilize the historical unconscious, Ballard's hero, for Baxter, is a fringe rebel radically reordering post-war reality. His vision, coming from an oblique angle in the peripheral of mainstream culture, reorders the flat surface of media culture and subverts its official narratives. The postmodernist Ballard, equally stylish, is celebrated for his flatness and detachment. Jean Baudrillard (1991[1976]) appreciates *Crash* (1995[1973]), arguably Ballard's most iconic work about a TV executive rehearsing eroticized car crashes on the motorway, for

its clinical, detached tone in accepting the postmodern reality of simulacra. For Baudrillard (1991), the compulsive assemblage of abject bodies and crashed cars is an illustrative example of the ascendence of image over reality. The modernist Ballard and postmodernist Ballard are stylishly opposed. The divided readings of Ballard, between provocation and assimilation, between modernism and postmodernism, between avant-garde art and mainstream culture identify two types of suburbia: one is spectacular and exotic; the other is flat and homogeneous. In a way, Ballard's work dramatizes the doubleness of suburbia, and Ballard criticism reiterates it.

In the same way that the avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde are ambiguously critical of and imbricated in media and consumer landscape, critics also struggle to determine if Ballard is approving of his heroes or not. Those who look for provocative postures in Ballard's work cannot always find unwavering support from the author. In *Crash*, he undermines critical distance by naming his pathological protagonist after himself. In the preface to the 1974 French edition of *Crash*, he claims the book is a 'cautionary tale' and later retrieves the claim. In *High-Rise* (1975) he satirizes the fall of a modernist architecture yet champions Le Corbusier as the greatest architect of the twentieth century. As *Empire of the Sun* (1984) that dramatizes his childhood experience in Shanghai during the second world war provides sources for his visual imageries – airplanes and drained swimming pools, it is also tempting to associate his stylish repetition with his unresolved, traumatic war memory. It is hard to tell if the messiah is playful or serious, a visionary or a mental patient.

For Roger Luckhurst (1997, p13), Ballard's 'unreadable' work occupies a 'hinge' in between the avant-garde and the mainstream, modernism and postmodernism, high and low culture that sets in motion an oscillation. Like his fictional suburbs, the hinge is a liminal space that entices and resists thetic articulations, trapping the readers in a Ballardian world of idiomatic expressions and authorial signatures. Although Luckhurst (1997, p181) rejects Baudrillard's 'ecstatic surrender' to Ballard's 'unreadability', he still assigns this enigmatic hinge effect to an elevated position of literature. While literature remains recalcitrant to and destructive of theories' fixed boundaries, it remains deliciously fuzzy and ungraspable. Ballard is still hovering on a threshold powered by the tension in between. A martlet (a mythological

footless bird unable to land), he is condemned to fly. Even a thetic articulation of Ballard's in-betweenness repeats the enigma of his fictional scenario.

Ballard's ambiguous posture is connected to the conflicted attitude towards the concept of the avant-garde. Drawing on Rosalind Krauss's critique of the avant-garde that draws attention to its violent and mythical energies, Luckhurst (1997, p109) notes that when aligned with the avant-garde, Ballard's work is also needs be considered in much darker terms. Baxter (2009), in associating Ballard with the avant-gardes' spectacular historiography, understands the avant-garde by its resistance to the capitalist reality. The two faces of Ballard thus have to do with a utopian and dystopian conception of the avant-garde.

A starting point of this thesis is: how do we make sense of Ballard's posture? As the theoretical frameworks in literary and art history, as Luckhurst (1997) rightly points out, are unstable and inadequate, their interconnections remain underexplored: how do we make of the collaboration, echo, and collusion between the set of categories Ballard's work sets in motion? How do we make sense of the enigmatic mirror effects in his avant-garde postures and counter postures? What is the secret logic that unites the two faces of the avant-garde, its proclaimed failure and lasting impact?

The life and death of the avant-garde

Peter Bürger ([1971]1984) in his influential theory of the avant-garde tells a story of its decline and bankruptcy by pointing out a paradox or antinomy: as avant-gardism dismantles art's autonomy and institutionalized form it also loses the critical distance from it purports to critique. In a false sublation of art and life, art has descent into culture industry. Evan Mauro (2013, p120) in 'The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics' contends Bürger's thesis and gives an account of the history of the avant-garde around its life and repeated revival. He redefines the avant-garde as an ongoing attempt to create value 'outside' existing matrix which are then recuperated back in new economic structures of capitalism. For Mauro, the avant-garde is 'a contingent and labile value struggle that wanted to find new modes of aesthetic valuation'. As the avant-garde art rejects the reified critical apparatus in the capitalist system, it seeks to establish a new metric for calculating art's value.

When the avant-garde's attempt to find new forms and structures for a future life 'outside' of capitalism's institutional order, it converges with larger revolutionary projects at specific times. Its descent into commercialization or totalitarianism, therefore, does not mark the failure of a revolutionary project, but its success.

In an alternative genealogy, Mauro points out these specific conjunctures of the avant-garde art and political vanguardism. Futurism, for instance, turns away from liberal capitalism to socialism/fascism where the state provides the horizon of production. Surrealism, cubism and dada's anti-representational practices and subversion of ornamental aesthetics have paved way for the planned economy of the Keynesian state. The post-war reconstruction in Britain has witnessed the resurgence of brutalism and Fordism. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the state-dominated bureaucratic capitalism has solidified into another immobile structure and lethargic state described in Guy Debord's *Spectacle* (1967) and Warhol's parody of standardized commodities, pop surrealism and the countercultural movement again mobilize surrealist and Dadaist anti-rationalist strategy to break new ground. The new-avant-garde's anti-capitalist, anti-establishment and anti-state critique and defense of individual freedom have only reiterated capitalism's transformation into the post-Fordist, neoliberal model of production, where the laborer becomes more mobile in a state of adhocracy.

In Mauro's analysis, the avant-garde is not for or against aesthetic autonomy in the realm of art history, but tirelessly searches for 'outsides' and 'time-outs' from existent structures. The avant-garde project envisions an alternate ordering in a bounded sphere, a test field or laboratory and plays a liminal role in between the transitions of social structures or systems. I relate this attempt to seek an 'outside' and 'time-out' in a liminal zone with Ballard's utopian/dystopian (sub)urban places that repeat a 'departure – transformation – entrapment' narrative. Ballard dramatizes these 'outsides', especially in his urban trilogy, as a series of abandoned, overlooked in-between spaces enfolded within mobility infrastructure, which promises an exotic destination but defers the arrival, where the characters are both transcending and deeply imbricated within. Their childlike play in the suburbia - imaginative gardens and nondescript zones - is both set against and embedded within a machinic flow of the motorway looming in the background – an endlessly stretching concrete belt in the cyclic process of urban construction. As the avant-garde embarks on a journey to a new territory, it

generates suburbia as a test site to envision new, more mobile and modular forms. In the series of explosions of the car crash, it clears the ground for more efficient systems to emerge. Such an 'outside' is not merely conceptual but embedded in the technological conditions at the time and participates in the production of space. It is not anti-structural but has an alternative ordering reactionary to that of the existing apparatus. As the 'hinge' is a concrete material object embedded in the infrastructure of two planes (doors or windows), the suburban outside is also a medium, bridge and structural link with a material and geographical basis; it is embedded in real time and space featuring specific ways of ordering. Suburbia's infrastructural role and embeddedness in urban landscape illuminate avant-gardism's embeddedness in social ordering.

As Mauro (2013, p129) points out, the recuperation thesis 'explains a certain definitional confusion around modernism's politics: why certain modern movements can seem to be both revolutionary and reactionary, or rather why they look radical from one vantage point and conformist from another'. Mauro's thesis also explains why Ballard's posture looks radical for some and conformist for others. Ballard's repetitive and schematic plots only paint a cursory and condensed picture of this historical development. Yet the crude picture illuminates a path, a topology, a dialectical pattern, a posture. It reveals a finer-grained mechanism of formlessness-form at work than Bürger's 'sublation' thesis. The avant-garde is marked by two intertwined impulses: one mobilizes, the other restabilizes. One clears the ground, one reinserts control.

The avant-garde is still alive in global capitalism and can generate 'outsides' (Mauro, 2013, p120) whenever there is 'a struggle over the means of social reproduction, or over the capacity for groups and collectivities to engage in non-capitalist forms of social exchange and relationality. (Mauro, 2013, p123). When Bürger sees the avant-garde as a failed aesthetic movement and warns us of the danger of reviving it, Mauro (2013, p120) asks: 'If the avant-garde is indeed a failed political concept, what does it say that many of its forms, rhetorics, and basic gestures survive beyond its expiry date, especially in today's anti-capitalist and alter-globalization movements?' My reading of Ballard resonates with this line of enquiry. The avant-garde dream of flight into a new management doctrine has a colonial undertone, which is also dramatized by the proliferation of Ballard's suburban places across the global urban landscape.

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Rather than finished or failed, the avant-garde is still alive and embedded within the urban landscape as a coded language that needs continuous decoding.

The rise and fall of photography

The recuperation thesis is more than a defeatist acknowledge of an adaptive capitalist system. In this section, I will contextualize Ballard's work in a postindustrial and 'postmedium' landscape that does not mark the failure of the avant-garde but still contain its utopian potentials.

After the revolutionary energy that culminated in 1968 has died down, in the 1970s Peter Bürger announces the death of the avant-garde. In Ballard's fictions about gated communities, Europe has gradually lain flat in suburban resident complexes dreaming up new pathologies. Breaking away from the legacy of the Keynesian state, Britain shifts to a post-Fordist production model and a somber and gloomy leisure society shaped by Thatcher's neoliberal policy. The ascendence of liberalism and consumerism culminates in Mark Fisher's claim in *Capitalist Realism* (2009) that there is no way to imagine an alternative to capitalism. Before the term is popularized by Fisher to express an end-of-time sentiment, 'capital realism' is used by Brian Griffin to describe his own photographic style (Mobbs-IIes, 2021) that features his photo album *Black Country Dada* 1969-1990 (2021). In this formative period of Griffin's work, he repeatedly charts the post-industrial landscape of the West Midlands occupied by proud and defiant worker-heroes intimately involved with their tools and immersed in their environment: a worker kissing his tool, a woman harvesting in the cornfield 'lit by the weak glow of a coming dawn', or a male construction worker looking at up a dark sky lit by fireworks. While Fisher uses the term to denote the all-encompassing force of the capitalist system, Griffin uses it to denote the redemptive potential in the body and the material. Griffin's *Black Country Dada* (2021) and *Work* (1988) have both collected a black-and-white version of Ballard's 1979 portrait which I showed above. Together with other workers' portraits, Ballard is recast as a 'black country dada', a worker-artist in a post-industrial landscape glimmering with light.

The interim between the swinging sixties and the divisive eighties still has a receding light of

tomorrow. When the avant-garde's radical critiques of capitalism and utopian future are dying in an increasingly depthless and dematerialized media landscape, there is still hope in a 'twilight zone of material obsolescence' where tactility and authenticity are embedded in technological waste. Like in Griffin's photographs, Ballard's worker-artist hero is constantly building a personal abode in the catastrophic site at an ambiguous time between dawn and dusk. As the photographic quality in Ballard's work is widely noted, Griffin's photography, like Ballard's fiction, re-stages his worker-subject into an actor and a fictional character. Using props, fictional devices and performing 'technical gymnastics', Griffin (2015) calls himself the last living photographer who engages with the material aspect of photography in the age of digitization and CGI.

The artist-acrobat juggling a set of props available to his use is also what Claude Lévi-Strauss (1996) calls a '*bricoleur*' and an engineer, performing diverse tasks and making do with materials at hand to construct myth out of the idea and images of cultural residue. For Lévi-Strauss, mythology performs a bricolage on the left-over cultural fragments and reuses them in new recombination. With a still, flat, mystic quality, Griffin and Ballard's work compose a mythology that re-emplaces the worker-subject into the apocalyptic landscape. The avant-garde's project can be seen in a new light: it is a modern mythology that means to emplace the historical subject, the labourer, at the centre of his illuminated environment.

In his 1931 essay 'A Small History of Photography', Walter Benjamin (1985, p243) argues that due to the crude practice of the photographer and the lengthy pose of the sitter, photography can capture the 'optical unconscious'. It urges the beholder to look back and rediscover 'the tiny spark of contingency' (Benjamin, 1985, p243) emanating from the past. Through the backward look, the bourgeoise subject's murky, glimmering auratic specificity is brought 'out of darkness' (Benjamin, 1985, p248). In the later stage of photography, however, when the lens is larger and admits in more light and more advanced visual techniques of close-up and sharp focus bring the object closer to the viewer, the 'spark of contingency' is 'cleansed' and 'dispelled' (249). In the estranged cityscapes depicted by French photographer Atget, Benjamin (1985, p250) accounts, the aura of the street is destructed. Predating surrealism, Atget's photography 'pump[s] the aura out of reality' (Benjamin, 1985, p250) and demystifies the cityscape by illuminating its details.

No longer able to capture a person's aura, Benjamin argues, photography in the age of

technological reproducibility should be used to demystify and illuminate the historical and material conditions of reality. In his 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Benjamin (1968) sees photography as a political art form that can emancipate the work of art from its auratic traditions and become a universal practice by virtue of its technological reproducibility. In Rosalind Krauss's (1999a) review, Benjamin in 'A Small History of Photography' is still interested in photography as 'a historical and aesthetic object' and a representational form. Yet five years later in his 'Work of Art' essay, he has envisioned photography as a 'theoretical' object that can bring about the demise of the aura in all art. As a theoretical medium, Krauss argues, photography has been freely taken up by the avant-gardes to break generic boundaries: The shock effects produced by dada, futurism, photo and filmic montage, as Benjamin declares, can be indifferent to their respective medium. Photography's rise as a theoretical medium, generic because translatable, has brought about 'a wholesale transformation of modern art' where 'the entire world of artistic technique and tradition drops away' (Krauss, 1999a, p293) including the techniques of photography itself. Barthes's *Mythologies* and Baudrillard's *Simulacra* have showcased that photography has 'left behind its identity as a historical and aesthetic object' and becomes a 'theoretical object'. These postmodern conditions, however, have already happened in Benjamin's hands (Krauss, 1999a, p290).

In light of Mauro's 'value struggle' thesis, photography in its theoretical mode has given the artist a new 'outside', a virtual, theoretical and structuralist realm for social / artistic production/reproduction and a new rubric to evaluate both. If we consider the avant-garde movement as a 'value struggle' outside existent structures, Benjamin's hopeful prediction in *Work of Art* to destruct art's aura has only been realized in, rather than crashing on the shore of, Baudrillard's *Simulacra* (1981). Rosalind Krauss (1999a) in her review of the history of photography makes a similar point. The two faces of the provocative and conformist avant-garde mirror two types of the photographic image theorized by Benjamin and Baudrillard.

As Mauro looks back at mid-century neo-avant-garde's assimilation into neoliberal society by looking back at the historical avant-garde's recuperation in state capitalism and offers an alternative genealogy/definition of the avant-garde, in 'Reinventing the Medium' (1999a), Krauss looks back at art's reconvergence with photography in the 1960s by looking at its prior occurrence in the 1920s. For Krauss, modern art is marked by a post-medium condition, where medium specificity is canceled in the production of art. To 'reinvent the medium' in the postmedium age, Krauss holds, is not to return to revive any art traditions that are successfully obliterated by the theoretical object of photography. Recharting the history of photography, Krauss looks back at Benjamin's hallmark posture of looking back, from his collection of outmoded objects to his enthusiastic celebration of photography's future by theorizing its capacity to authenticate the past. Krauss notes that Benjamin, with his backward posture, has already gestured at the redemptive potential in the outmoded: when photography passes from a mass social practice to an industrial discard with the popularity of digital imaging in the 1980s, the artist can use photography to reinvent 'a set of conventions derived from the material conditions of a given technical support' (Krauss, 1999a, p296). In the 'twilight zone of material obsolescence' (Krauss, 1999a, p295), photography reveals its utopian potential at the point of its inception: its promise of becoming a medium, which is also the promise of the plurality of arts and the heterogeneity and diversity of medium outside the unified idea of Art. Krauss redefines the concept of medium as well as modern art as 'constructed' within a system of differences and a set of conventions, rather than given by a canonized 'tradition' or an original author. The artist is not an inventor of new forms but works as an archaeologist and collector embedded within 'the relationship between a technical (or material) support and the conventions with which a particular genre operates' (1999b, pp5-6). Artistic medium's specificity does not come from its status as pure art but comes from the specific way that the practitioner reuses old art forms as a constitutive layer of the new medium.

Krauss regards James Coleman, among others, who rose from and grew out of the neo- avant-garde conceptual art practices of the 1970s, as an emblematic example of reinventing the medium in art's postmedium age. Coleman, as Krauss (1999a) analyses, draws on several by- now outmoded medium forms - promotional slide tape, comic strips and photonovel – and invests their material and physical support with expressiveness. Coleman's 'double face-outs', for instance, is a technique taken from comic strips where the action/reaction sequence is flattened in a single frame and, as a result, the interlocuters face the same direction rather than at each other. The flatness is an acknowledgement of the conventions of narrativity and is a formal reflection of the disembodied planarity of his medium. Krauss also connects Coleman's reinvention of the slide tape as a medium with the magic lantern slides, the medium of young Marcel's permutational powers in modernist author Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way*. She argues that the magic lantern slide is both a precursor of the phantasmagoria, and an inverse image of its ideology. In other words, the childlike permutations in the magic lantern show already contain the impetus of the phantasmagoria yet, when becoming an outmoded optical device it can work against its grain. As the 'armoring of technology' (Krauss, 1999a, p304) breaks down, the cognitive and imaginative capacity in the slide tape is released, made retrievable, and serves as the resource for Coleman's reinvention of the medium. Coleman's use of low materials as the grammatical components in his films, Krauss notes, is different from a neo- avant-garde's parodic pretension of non-art or postmodernism's nostalgic pastiche of modernist forms. Rather, it comes out of the conviction that medium still exists and more importantly, it does not have to come from 'the pregiven, privileged space called art' (Krauss, 1999a, p302).

Krauss's relook at Benjamin is not a nostalgic look at early-stage photography or a disparagement of the postmedium condition of modern art but acknowledges its ability to challenge the privileged, ontic status of Art, in the way that it has brought a transition from aesthetics to theory and from nature to structure. In her structuralist analysis of modern art in a series of essays collected in *Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*, originally published in 1985, Krauss (1986) has already debunked the notion of an original avant-garde artist on self-exile. She points out that modern art's originality emerges from acts of recombination and repetition within a theoretical, structural field. Undercutting the binary of originality and repetition, she challenges how the former is valorized and the latter is discredited. As I will elaborate in chapter one, modern art's reliance on structure, especially its frequent use of the 'grid' form, Krauss holds, liberates art from notions of originality and tradition. To appreciate the inauthenticity of copies and reproductivity of the grids is to acknowledge the ritualistic, mythological function of art and to demystify the artist's role as a creator, a grand inventor of new forms.

In light of Krauss's analysis, the so-called postmodern landscape does not simply signal the failure of the avant-garde / modernism but retains its legacy and utopian promises. Rather than an inventor, the artist now operates as a '*bricoleur*', reusing a set of outmoded technological forms to construct his/her own medium. Ballard's work that sits ambiguously in between modernism and postmodernism can be contextualized in this shift from nature to structure, from originality to reproducibility, from traditional medium to constructed medium. Ballard's survey of the overlit realm of the media landscape is not simply informed by an ethical / political attack, subversion, rejection. He is immanent in the overlit realm, reappropriating its props and reinventing his medium.

Reinventing the medium of art and place

Ballard's reappropriation of popular cultural forms, such as science fiction and crime fiction, is more than a neo-avant-garde anti-art practice but mobilizes their imaginative, iconographic potential to reinvent his medium. In 'Which Way to Inner Space', written in 1962 for the avant-garde science fiction magazine *New Worlds*, Ballard (2023 [1962], p6) describes science fiction as 'the literature of tomorrow'. In 'Time, Memory and Inner Space' written a year later, he sees science fiction as 'the only medium with adequate vocabulary' (1963, [no pagination]) for charting the inner space. In Ballard's description, the inner space is synthetic, formless, boundless, rich with visual symbols, taking their impetus both from external reality and personal memories. Still heavily influenced by surrealism's visual techniques, he sees science fiction as a largely visual medium, similar to that of surrealist painting, which can imitate the irrational, transgressive, disorderly sequence of a dream. Using the medium to merge, fuse and dissolve boundaries between the inner and outer, fantasy and reality, a work of art can create an effect of 'magical potency' and 'curious ambivalence'. *The Atrocity Exhibition* (2001 [1971]), containing a series of 'condensed novels' composed from 1962-1970, is such an iconography of the inner space. Mixing fiction, film, photography, TV newsreel, science journals, medical reports, advertisements, Ballard violates the boundaries between different medium forms to generate the surrealist shock-effect. Meanwhile, it is completely penetrated by the logic of mass media and takes on its placeless, disembodied effects. The space of *The Atrocity Exhibition* is indistinguishable from the mass media landscape and shares with its promiscuity and indeterminacy. The reader, completely enmeshed and disoriented in the cubist text, is advised to abandon any navigational effort and start to read from any page. However, as the text's media promiscuity embraces the heterogeneous experiences of TV culture, its critical power is lost.

From *Crash* onwards, Ballard starts to rework his medium. Developed from one short text 'Crash!' (1969) in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, *Crash* is scavenged from the weightless realm of the Spectacle and reworked into an artistic medium with a recursive, claustrophobic structure. It compresses the formless and fluid visual field into a machinic flow and monotonous order. As

Luckhurst (1997) notes, the polyphony in *The Atrocity Exhibition* and cubist structure has disappeared into the monologic flow in *Crash*, a claustrophobic text with no outside. Ballard starts to develop a flattened, open-ended cyclic narrative without depth and self-consciously acknowledges the tradition of narrativity and the disembodied planarity of his own medium. As Krauss points out, the medium of fiction is the 'impossible attempt to transform succession into stasis, or a chain of parts into a whole' (Krauss,1999b, p53). Ballard's fiction uses highly contrived language, performing a series of 'technical gymnastics', to perform such a way of ordering and draws attention to its mechanical and inherently reductive operation. As the aggregative assemblage of the text imitates the phantasmagoria and its permutational powers, the flatness and enclosure of his narrative undercut the effortless fluidity and continuity. His abuse of 'simile' also mirrors the visual technique of photography's collage. By compressing two objects that bear visual and formal similarity with each other into a contrived equation, his simile is unreadable. Yet the unreadability undercuts the symbolic efficacy of the visual image. In *Crash*, Ballard also starts to develop a narrative where the narrator is both attracted and repelled by a charismatic leader of a fringe group. This formulaic narrative also vocalizes the schizophrenic nature and 'bivalent' structure of photography: by pumping aura out of reality, its archive of traces calls for a reader as a schizophrenic counterpart of the artist. I will elaborate on these points in my reading of *Crash* in chapter one.

This modified medium, due to its closure, allows Ballard to 'frame' rather than 'disperse' experiences in the increasingly ambiguous technological landscape of the 20th century. In the preface to 1974 French edition of *Crash!*, Ballard writes:

> The marriage of reason and nightmare which has dominated the 20th century has given birth to an ever more ambiguous world. Across the communications landscape move the spectres of sinister technologies and the dreams that money can buy. Thermonuclear weapons systems and soft drink commercials coexist in an overlit realm ruled by advertising and pseudo-events, science and pornography. Over our lives preside the great twin leitmotifs of the 20th century – sex and paranoia. Despite McLuhan's delight in high-speed information mosaics we are still reminded of Freud's profound pessimism in Civilization and its Discontents . Voyeurism, self-disgust, the infantile basis of our dreams and longings – these diseases of the psyche have now culminated in the most terrifying casualty of the [20th] century: the death of affect (Ballard, 2023 [1974], pp10-11).

In the ambiguous and mosaic landscape of communications landscapes, Ballard identifies a series of paired terms, duo relations and twin expressions – 'reason and nightmare', 'science and pornography', 'sex and paranoia', 'civilization and discontents'. From the structureless and formless realm of the *The Atrocity Exhibition* rises a set of binary forms and dialectical structures, and *Crash*, 'the first pornographic novel based on technology' (Ballard, 1995, p6) is a modern mythology that contains the tension between 'science' with 'fiction'.

In a 1977 TV review, Ballard also starts to acknowledge the innately reductive character of the medium of science fiction as an iconographic art form. He (1977, [no pagination]) comments that science fiction is able to construct a 'world picture' that 'embraces the whole cosmos, all of time'. Through the photographic image of the cosmos, science fiction establishes a cult. Science fiction writers, Ballard (1977) holds, have access to 'a world of gigantic power and authority. All of time and space suddenly come into their control [...] They get a tremendous sense of reassurance, a sort of mystical and religious identity with the unseen powers of the universe'. Science fiction's iconography points at two directions: science and mythology. Through constructing a second order it fulfils our primal need to dominate the unknown through inserting an order on it. Science fiction is monopolized by a fringe group of authors and readers. The cultish state of art that the neo-avant-gardes seek to demolish by using non-art cultural forms seems to make a dark comeback.

Ballard brings the mass-cult vehicle of science fiction out of their cultish corners and brings it to interact with the conventions of world-building, myth-making literature of 'Homer, Shakespeare and Milton'. He harnesses its myth-making capacity to deal with the future by 'plac[ing] a philosophical and metaphysical frame around the most important events within our lives and consciousness'. 'I believe that if it were possible to scrap the whole of existing literature and be forced to begin again without any knowledge of the past, all writers would find themselves inevitably producing something very close to science fiction'. Free from artistic pedigree and defying originality, it can be used as a reusable, recyclable medium to deal with the everchanging present, with what is happening in the near future, and depict 'man's place in the universe' (Ballard, 2023, p12).

For anthropologist Marc Augé (1995), 'the age of supermodernity' is marked by the proliferation of 'non-places', transient and in-between, they are where we briefly traverse and are unable to connect to. In other words, they are fundamentally 'un-dwell-able'. What Augé calls 'non-places' - the motorway, the airport - are also a set of spaces that reoccur in Ballard's fictions. 'Overlit' and 'elaborately signalled', these places are also marked by the photographic vision. They can be seen as a spatial 'medium' in its theoretical and generic mode and in the middle of a 'wholesale transformation of urban places'. Nondescript yet everywhere, their apotheosis as a medium to connect the urban landscape coincides with the eclipse of their specificity and historicity as a place. One could call them 'postmedium' spaces, which as the apt name of 'non-place' suggests, have destroyed the concept of a place together with its aesthetic traditions. In Ballard's work, these places are also not as 'dystopian' as Augé describes; they are reinvented and reoccupied. His apocalyptic narrative casts a backward look at the future obsolescence of these by-now technologically advanced places and unveils their constitutive layers and constructed nature. As these technological places break down, they also release their liberatory potential at the point of their inception. Stripped of a specific 'identity' (placeness) and without an 'author' (constructor), these places no longer generate permanent relations and meanings. Rather, they create a theoretical and discursive field where objects and humans are excavated from familiar contexts and engage in temporary, improvisational relations. The place as a medium is also 'built' (with a contingent, aggregative nature) rather than 'given' (with a prescribed, permanent meaning). In their obsolescence, these places expose their material conditions and specificity as a medium – they are not generic, replicable non-places marked by homogeneity and boredom, but specific sites with histories, concrete materials, and heterogeneous users/occupants.

Ballard's reinvention of the medium thus becomes twofold. His hero is both a bricoleur and a dweller, charting the uncertain terrain left by modernist movements. Using postmedium art to chart the postmedium landscape, Ballard gives expression to how large-scaled socioeconomic transitions intersect with personalized and localized experiences, how grand political projects intersect with basic human impulses of homemaking. Ballard's reinvented medium also blurs the boundary between art/life/politics. Featuring an 'worker' hero who is

oblivious of the impasse and interdiction of the historical schema of 'modernism' and 'postmodernism', and therefore is free from the moral obligation to condemn art's utopia, Ballard's fiction gives an alternative account of history that is not progressively led by the avant-garde intellectuals, and an alternative account of art which is tangential to its political and historical mission. This resonates with Jacques Rancière's project that seeks to rescue contemporary art from the gap between utopia and anti-utopia, and to 'create a little breathing room' in the 'atmosphere of guilt'. Art is alternatively defined as 'fabricator of forms of life' to 're-establish an element of indeterminacy in the relationship between artistic production and political subjectivization' and to '[free] artistic and political creativity from the yoke of the great historical schemata that announce the great revolutions to come or that mourn the great revolutions past only to impose their proscriptions and their declarations of powerlessness on the present'. Shaking off the guilt and despair imposed by the end-of-utopia narrative, contemporary art and politics can rechart the landscape of 'the given and the possible' (Rancière, 2007, [no pagination]).

Both Rancière's and Krauss's theses call for a renewed inspection on forms to renegotiate political possibility. To rescue contemporary art from its straitjacketed position in art's utopia/dystopia, the terms such as art, politics and life need to be redefined. In this sense, Ballard's in-betweenness and undecidedness can be located in an enlivening meeting place between artistic, urban, and political practice that have been perceived in separate terms.

2. Research Aims and Methods

In laying out the research context, I've associated Ballard's posture of looking back with that of Benjamin and read his suburbia as the twilight zone of post-medium art and post-industrial landscape populated by Augéan 'non-places'. In this historical framework, Ballard's work is both science and mythology and needs to be seen in both artistic and geographical contexts.

The aim of this thesis is twofold. One part of my thesis aims to look back at the avant-garde art and bring it to new light. Krauss's relook at Benjamin has brought into light the impetus in photography that was germinating yet not fully apparent in his time and thus maps out a new Benjamin. I will cast the historical path of the avant-garde in the light of the new

historical conditions of Ballard's (sub)urban landscapes that extend towards the beginning of the 21st century. From Ballard's historiography, we can grasp the 'traces' of the avant-garde's move in and out of dominant cultural systems, their cyclic patterns, two-faced postures, their stylized oppositions and conformations and their revival in contemporary times. To compensate for the critical energy that mainly takes up the aesthetic dimension of Ballard's work as well as the concept of the avant-garde and looks for themes of subversion, formlessness, openness, and transgression, I read into the centre, boundary, structure, hierarchy, rhythm and discursive frameworks that emerge from their seemingly formless topologies and grapple with their unreadable and schizophrenic nature. My reading counters the 'suburbanization' of Ballard, a reading of Ballard that ties him to an idealized fringe perspective and the moribund concept of the avant-garde as a failed or past aesthetic movement.

My reading starts with a discussion of Ballard's avant-gardism in literary criticism and art history and moves onto the urban context to explore its spatial expression. Another part of my thesis aims to follow avant-garde's conjunctural relationship with the built environment. Ballard's fictions map out the 'afterlife' of modernism in postmodern urban reality and have anticipated contemporary architectural discourses and practices that look for transgressive and political potentials in liminal spaces. His suburbia reconciles the demarcation between 'non-places' which are seen as rigidly structured and homogenous, and 'heterotopias' which are often seen as formless and transgressive. These two terms depict two faces of infrastructural places that correspond to the two faces of the avant-garde – the transgressive and conformist. In Ballard's fictions, the transformation of 'non-places' into 'heterotopias' is enclosed in a circular narrative and dramatized as two parts of the same process. While the cyclic narrative cautions us against the avant-garde's revival and the colonization of new places by middle-class lifestyles, the anonymous worker-bricoleur also illuminates the man-made, constructed nature of a place, and opens imaginative avenues of place-making and political action. I will bring Ballard's fictional scenarios that portray multi-scaled human experiences to intersect with and concretize paradigm shifts in geographical discourses about place-formation and homemaking. The intersection between Ballard's work and urban geography can shed light on a new set of challenges and opportunities we witness now.

Reconceptualizing forms

To analyze the dialectic between form/formlessness both in literature and geography, and to recover a sense of hope through reconciling the demarcation between aesthetic and material forms, between formalist/structuralist thinking and historical materialism, a reconceptualization of forms is essential. Aesthetic forms and material forms are not static and unchanging, rather, they are travelling, colliding, and generating new forms in different time and context. Forms do have a historical dimension and can be reappropriated and reconfigured in new contexts. To discuss Ballard's reinvention of artistic medium and geographic spaces, it seems necessary to mobilize a rethinking of forms and shuffle these antithetical categories.

To develop such an approach, I draw on literary critic and infrastructuralist Caroline Levine's conception of form in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015). In a bid to bring together aesthetic forms and social forms which have been considered in separate realms, Levine (2015, p3) borrows from design theory and defines forms quite broadly as 'all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference', a way of 'ordering, patterning, shaping' that offer a wide range of 'affordances'. Her interdisciplinary work looks at the relations between material culture and literary texts outside Marxist dialectics, hierarchies and casualties often associated with material structures and cultural superstructures. Levine's reconceptualization of forms is deeply entangled with her political agenda. On the one hand, she criticizes structuralism's search for unchanging, transhistorical, universal, apolitical forms and new criticism's self-enclosed aesthetic sphere autonomous from social reality. On the other hand, she is unsatisfied with how poststructuralism, by dismantling structures, is losing sight of forms and leaving little room for considering how they condition daily life. Forms, for Levine, are material, situated and political on the one hand and portable on the other, i.e., they can travel across time, planes and categories. They do political work in specific contexts.

Noting how poststructuralism-informed politics is often understood as subversion, destructions of forms and breaking of boundaries, she defines politics as a way of arranging, relating, and distributing that relies on the constructive aspect of forms. Levine proposes that

forms contain as well as they constrain. Criticizing Foucault's society of control that associates form solely with restriction, exclusion and 'frightening models of political control and totality', she (2015, p31) argues that culture is not based on a permanent and dominant ordering that is pre-designed and reproduced. Rather, it is made up of a collection of heterogeneous forms whose travelling and colliding, making and unmaking brings new political opportunities and generates unexpected results. Multiple, overlapping forms proffer their affordances to us when we encounter them across time and space, in a much more chaotic and contingent way than we might think. Working together they could generate surprisingly emancipatory results. By highlighting the permutational nature of social reality, that is, it is not a streamlined, hegemonic block, but an infrastructural system that allows for ordering and reordering, she proposes to use methods of literary analysis to navigate the multiple patterns and structures that shape social reality. Since it is impossible to imagine a world without forms, we need a careful, nuanced understanding of their relations, and a closer engagement with their interactions.

Marijeta Bozovic (2017, p1182) takes issue with Levine's omission of Russian formalism and her failure to mention figures such as Tynianov, Jakobson and Bakhtin. Bozovic argues the problem of aligning form with confinement that Levine seeks to address has already been addressed by Russian formalists. Tynianov (1924, cited in Bozovic, 2017, p1182), for instance, has debunked the analogy of 'form-content=glass-wine'. Another formalist thinker Bozovic has in mind is Viktor Shklovsky who sees art as 'defamiliarization' to revitalize life in his manifesto 'Art as Device' published in 1916. Form's intersection with social and political conditions, in other words, is not an original idea. However, as Russian formalism is repressed by Stalin's regime and when the word 'form' is somewhat obsolete, Levine's concept of form, I suggest, is less an original argument than a reinventive project that continues to address an old problem in new times. Levine's thinking about forms continues to bring poetics to bear on changing social phenomena, in a way that is neither utopian nor historicist. To rethink forms is not to bring back a certain historical branch of formalism, but to rethink the role of poetics in new historical conditions. Levine's broad definition of form, which has been criticized for diluting its meaning, also scavenges the term from its outmoded state and allows it to act as a specific 'medium'

with concrete historical and material conditions, to suture the gap between aesthetics and social reality. There is also a parallel to be drawn with Krauss. In Krauss's analysis, the 'forms' hidden in the physical and material support of an outmoded medium can be reused and 'invested with expressiveness' in new circumstances. Her structuralist reading of the avant-garde art does not simply point out a 'dark' side of repetition and de-sublimation. Rather, she gives an account of what the form of the grid can do: its 'bivalent' structure contains as well as confines and allows the artist to operate outside the confines of artistic canon. By laying out the grid as the 'the infrastructure of vision', Krauss (1986, p15) stresses the fictitious nature of the canvas surface and the freedom in permutational play that relies on repetition, confinement, passivity and automation. The revolutionary register of the grid lies in its ability to disassociate the work of art from tradition and open a new discursive realm where meaning can be generated internally, structurally and procedurally. Krauss's structuralist notion of modern art means to challenge Clement Greenberg's method which Krauss (1986, p1) perceives to be 'profoundly historicist' and 'conceives the field of art as at once timeless and in constant flux'. Departing from Greenberg's formalism and historicism, she emphasizes on the 'infrastructural' or 'poetic' nature of the medium. She offers an alternative model of medium as differential specificity and reconstructs an 'infrastructural' framework where the medium can be remade. Poetics or poetry in Greek means to make. The poet is a maker and a bricoleur. To emphasize the plurality, materiality and heterogeneity of its forms is to acknowledge the agency of the maker.

Ballard's suburbia contains as well as confines. Krauss and Levine's approach to forms helps me analyse the dynamic process beneath the enigmatic dialectic of form/formlessness in Ballard's fictions. It also helps me bring these insights into conversations with urban geography. Ballard's series of (sub)urban places, repeating similar geometries beneath their formlessness, are both claustrophobic and emancipatory, both embedded in real geographical and historical contexts and able to multiply across time and space. In his apocalyptic scenarios, forms travel across material, spatial, temporal, aesthetic, and political planes and are reappropriated and reinvented for new purposes. His works are more than documentations secondary to social reality, but themselves are a result of the complex collision of forms.

Echoing Levine's interdisciplinary work, my study of Ballard's suburbia on the planes of literature and geography also calls for an interdisciplinary method. Discipline, as a 'medium' to learn about the world, can enclose upon itself by forging a fixed image about its subject of study. The reinvented medium of interdisciplinarity necessitates the jumping across planes and negotiating between realms, and during this process, it takes certain methods and aims out of their familiar disciplinary background for alternative use in a new context, where one thing can be cast in the light of the other. By using a comparative lens, I mobilize the connective power of suburbia in bridging together spatial and textual form, literature and social reality.

Literature and Geography

Ballard's text has been a site where literature encounters geography and where literary critics meet urban thinkers, mobilities scholars and architects. In the special issue on *Concrete Island* published in the journal *Literary Geography* in 2016, Ballard's texts became a meeting point for both literary critics and geographers. The journal, with contributions by both literary critics and geographers, is a leading publication in the field of literary geography and has aims and concerns that are both literary and geographical. Other than a literary writer, Ballard has also been received as an important spatial thinker, a cartographer of urban space and a psychoanalyst of the urban environment. The wider implications of his work on urban planning as well as for an epistemology of urban space have been studied across disciplines. However, urban designers, architects, and geographers often take his work as documentaries of utopian and dystopian aspects of urban culture and fail to confront its ambiguous in-betweenness.

Geographers John Urry (2006) and Peter Merriman (2007) take Ballard's work as social critiques and cultural warnings of the detrimental aspects of car culture. Merriman (2007, p192) considers *Crash* as a cultural response to the arbitrary deaths on motorways which is lacking in social-historian studies of cars. He (2007, p210) also reads *Concrete Island*, originally published in 1974, as a text that has dramatized what cultural geographers observed only at the turn of the century: the imbrication of the driver within the 'generic, ubiquitous and placeless' environments of the motorway landscape. As I will elaborate in chapter two, architects from both western and eastern institutions pick up the speculative and avant-garde dimension of his work to envision experimental projects and to build more futuristic and interactive architecture. In the Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL, Ballard is taught and referred to by various scholars. Nic Clear (2009) uses Ballard's fiction in his course 'Crash -- Architectures of the Near Future' as an inspiration to create texts, pictures and films to explore the possibilities in future architecture design that challenge the planning mindset. *Crash* is used as a reference text in the MSc module 'Urban Imaginations' in UCL's Geography Department that is taught by literary scholars and geographers.

At Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts (SIVA) in China, *High-Rise* and 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista' are part of the curriculum for undergraduate students who study interactive art and architectural design. Dr. Stavros Didakis uses 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista' as a reference text in his undergraduate course 'Cyberception'. For him (2017, personal communication), the short story 'directly relates to speculations on architecture, emotional technology, human-computer symbiosis and how it alters our perception of reality'. One of the course conveners, Kun Chen (2017, personal communication), prompts his students to emulate Ballard's transgressive imagination in designing spatial projects. The students are encouraged to critique the superficiality and functionality prevalent in architectural design and attend to the unconscious impulses that register our latent responses to the built environment. Ballard's fictions have also inspired design engineer Dan Lockton's (2008) research on the 'architecture of control', which investigates how the embedded codes in systems regulate and shape users' behaviour. As I have listed, Ballard's works alert urban planners to people's emotional and pre-cognitive responses to architecture. Ballard's landscapes, which are animated, immersive and invite embodiment, sensual appropriation, and psychological subscription, offer imaginative points of departure from the rigidly planned and practicality-oriented urban spaces and open up a productive space for geographers, architects and urban designers to envision new futures. Ballard has inspired geographers and architects in reconceptualizing urban environments, but generally his works have only been briefly mentioned to dramatize geographical observations, without close engagement with their literary quality.

With the spatial turn in literary studies, more Ballard scholarship has been oriented towards geocentric approaches. Rob Latham (2007) in *Biotic Invasions: Ecological Imperialism in New Wave Science Fiction* associates Ballard's writing with contemporary environmental awareness. In *The Empires of J. G. Ballard: An Imagined Geography*, David Ian Paddy (2008) focuses on hidden imperial networks that underpin Ballard's literary spaces. Christopher Duffy (2015) uses Foucault's concept of the 'heterotopia' to make sense of Ballard's subversive spaces. Duffy's (2016) work has also appeared in the collection of essays: *J. G. Ballard: Landscape of Tomorrow*, in which Ballard's texts are read with a wide range of spatial theories. However, such readings have not kept up with the controversies over and changing meaning of

related spatial concepts such as 'non-place' and 'heterotopia'. Andrjez Gasiorek's (2005) reading of *Concrete Island* is built on the presumption that the motorway is an Augéan 'non-place', while whether the motorway is indeed a 'non-place' remains debatable for urban geographers (Merriman, 2007).

While geocritics sometimes lack deep understanding of the spatial concepts they borrow, geographers who read Ballard's work as either dark social reports or speculative blueprints for the future tend towards certainty and closure of meaning. They are guilty of producing reductionist readings of Ballard's texts as windows into truthful portrayals of spaces. There is also a disciplinary unease as both place too much emphasis on its own disciplinary concerns. It is interesting to see how the very attempt to transcend disciplinary boundaries often ends up strengthening disciplinary stereotypes, and the very intention to boost interdisciplinary communication tends to fixate two disciplines into a dichotomous structure.

The encounter between geography and literature dates far back and the two tend to insist on their own disciplinary focus. Geocriticism, a geo-centric mode of literary criticism (Westphal, 2011), and literary geography, an interdisciplinary field within human geography that engages with literary materials (Holes, 2018) have been flourishing since the humanistic turn in geography in the 1970s and 1980s and the spatial turn in humanities in the 1990s. Since the humanistic turn in urban geography, space is less seen as a container, stage or background for human activities. Rather, it is seen as mobile, in the becoming, and intimately shaped by human activities. Literary texts have become a source of inspiration for geographers to investigate the subjective and virtual aspect of concrete places. Place is now not merely conceived as a fixed physical property; rather, it is a cultural construction, fluid, contingent, with open boundaries, and involving a dynamic process of becoming (Harvey, 1996; Lefebvre, 1991; Jackson, 1994; Massey, 1994). This transformation converges with the poststructural and postmodern emphasis on the linguistic make-up of a place. In geography's cultural turn at the end of the 1980s, geographers' study of literary texts is strongly historicist. Formalism that solely examines the literary character of a work oblivious of historical and social processes is seen as problematic. After the turn of the century, however, human geographers (Kneale, 2017) have looked back at Bakhtin's notion of the 'chronotope' and rethink space in formal terms.

Like Bakhtin's literary places, social spaces are shaped by specific forms and relationality. Space is a contingent 'form' and specific 'medium' that participates in the generation of meaning. As is noted in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine, 2004, p7), the attention to the discursive and contingent nature of place 'problematized the taken- for-granted distinctions that often structure cultural understandings of the world – the distinction of self and other, near and far, black and white, nature and culture'; instead, places become 'real-and-imagined assemblages constituted via language'. The importance of senses and embodiment in conceptualizing space as more than a concrete background is prominent in landscape phenomenology. Non-representational theories are a reaction to a social constructivism in geography that holds the landscape as a backdrop and a context that distributes meaning to social practices (Anderson and Harrison, 2016). A non-representational reading of a place can reveal the subliminal energies, sensations, affections, urges, and drives that exist outside dominant cultural norms. Non-representational theories are also attentive to the unconscious and pre-personal content in a person's action, which goes beyond its cultural context.

These developments across the disciplines of geography, anthropology, and philosophy have impinged upon literature's role in spatial thinking as well as literary criticism. Spatial thinkers - cultural geographers among them - have shifted attention onto literature and the literary representation of space for its non-realist and discursive properties. When humanist geography turns to literature to restore subjectivity and human agency in making sense of places, fictions are taken as cultural artifacts and databanks of a 'collective subjective realism' (Brosseau, 1994, p336). Most literary texts have been rigidly associated with subjective experiences to be set against objective observations in social sciences. Within literary texts, geographers look for 'documentations' (Lando, 1996, p7) of people's experiences, ideologies, collective memory, and emotional attachment to places. It risks vulgar pragmatism that reduces literary texts to objective truth about urban reality. In other cases, literary writing provides a more affective epistemological model for understanding place complementary to the inherently analytical method in geography. Compared to geographical accounts of places, literary intuitions of places are (rather flatteringly) considered less tangible and more emotional, less documentary and more experiential, less factual and more universal. Literature is seen as

'repositories of universal truths' (Alexander, 2015, p3) and the border between art and science is reinforced. Even with due respect paid to literature's metaphorical nature, evocative tone, and generic specificity, the methodology by repositioning literature within the framework of place consciousness to extract territorial facts from fictional writing often induces a reductive reading of the text. Joanne Sharp (2000, p328) laments the loss of the original literary voice as the text is 'domesticated to the form of geographical writing'.

As Neal Alexander (2015, p5) notes, 'until relatively recently [geocritics and literary geographers] have often seemed to be talking at cross-purposes and, with a few notable exceptions, have tended to remain firmly within the bounds of their own disciplines'. When literary critic Robert Tally (2013) coins the word 'geocriticism' to refer to the studies of literary cartography and takes literary geography under its banner, Sheila Hones (2018) rejects this appropriation. Taking issue with the inherent literary orientation in Tally's 'geocriticism' and its lack of a 'geographical component', Hones (2018, p146) reiterates that literary geography, unlike geocriticism, 'retains a strong orientation toward geographical and, more generally, social science aims and methods'. She proposes (2018, p146) a 'double interdisciplinarity' in literary geography that places an equal focus on the text and geography. Building on Hones's idea, I add that to occupy a position in between literature and geography can help recover their underlying connection. Both text and space are the results of what Eric Prieto (2011, p25) terms the 'dynamic interpenetration of consciousness and world'. Their unity can amend the division between the place and the text, reality and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity. What would be the conscious make-up of material spaces and the material make up of textual production? Ballard's texts of suburbia occupy such an in-between position, where his textual permutation follows the order of the material world, and the aesthetic form mobilizes the aesthetic effect hidden in a place. The connective and synthetic power of his suburbia can certainly be mobilized in an interdisciplinary context.

A comparative lens between literature and geography provides a 'suburban' insight into both disciplines. It could potentially cast different light on the two disciplines and amend their limitations that only appear visible in each other's light. By putting literature and geography in dialogues and collisions, these aspects of each discipline may come to light and amend each other's limitations. The openness of literary text might destabilize geography's ethical and political certainty, and illuminate a sense of place that is uncertain, mobile, and transforming. Geography's orientation towards pragmatism may help remobilize the political energy in Ballard's work in contemporary time which has been somewhat restricted by historicist readings or an overemphasis on his ambiguity.

Cast in each other's light, the 'problem' of one field might serve as the solution to the other, one's enclosure can mean openness for the other, and one's virtuality can be actuality for the other. As Levine (2015) argues, literary texts can dynamically demonstrate how multiple forms overlap, while sociological studies on forms are limited by their empiricist tendency to investigate forms in isolation and thus miss much of their interconnectedness. The repetitiveness and enclosure of Ballard's texts that trouble literary critics can illuminate the seriality of urban spaces. Ballard's body of work composes a 'motion sculpture' of urbanity that helps us see places, materials, and social realities not as isolated, absolute and immutable, but as interactive, relational and malleable. His mega-text sets in motion various aspects of urbanity that tend to be examined separately in the discipline of social science. While conceptualizing places could benefit from the large quantity of original texts, a single author's vision can unify the multiple facets of the built environment that are hard to grasp and synthesize. Ballard's suburban aesthetics may also enrich geographers' conceptualization of the virtual and affective aspect of a place and bridge the real and the imagined, the external and internal, which according to John Wylie (2007) has always underpinned landscape studies. Science fiction, a genre that is particularly interested in suspending mimesis, opens up 'a cognitive space' set as a 'foil' (Kitchin and Kneale, 2002, p9) against real geographies. Ballard's texts challenge the understanding of places as fixed socio-economic and ideological constructs and weave a cobweb of 'virtual' meanings around a place as it is dwelled in, sensually mapped and experienced.

Virtuality has much currency in urban geography. The virtuality of urban experience can refer to place being virtually experienced through desires, memories, and imaginations ('imaginative virtuality'), or the virtual flow of digital technology ('digital virtuality'), or the possible events that might occur in the future ('temporal virtuality') (Latham et al, 2008, pp115-121). Ballard's dramatized urban landscapes lay bare the unconscious desires, hopes, dreams, and fantasies underpinning our mobile urban lifestyle, which are 'difficult to define while also registering something that makes a degree of intuitive sense' (Latham et al, 2008, p63). His work can serve an important source of reference for geographers as they conceive cities as more than concrete and static entities, but as 'a dynamic mix of virtuality and actuality' (Latham et al, 2008, p121) with 'a set of potentials which contain unpredictable elements' (Amin and Thrift, 2002, p4). As literary critic Bertrand Westphal (2011, p171) points out: 'literature actualizes new virtualities that had remained unformulated, interacts with the real, detects possibilities buried in the folds of the real, knowing that these folds have not been temporalized'.

Spatial discourses, in turn, can also provide a concrete and expanded context outside European cultural and artistic traditions and bring Ballard's texts into new light. The virtual and unreadable position between the angle of two walls can unfold, temporalize and actualize into concrete meanings in urban context. Ballard's suburbia is still unfolding and concretizing in contemporary landscapes that call for continuous reading. The difficulty of placing Ballard becomes a blessing – we can still hear echoes in the global urban context of his eccentric voice.

To conclude, I use suburbia as a methodology to juxtapose literature and geography and shed light on the blind spots in each discipline. On the one hand, the notion that space is man-made, in the becoming allows us to reconfigure the avant-garde as a liminal process. It is more than an elitist, artistic movement following an idealized notion of transgression on the margin, but an ongoing everyday practice that involves specific ways of ordering of people, spaces, and objects in the built environment. On the other hand, I use Ballard's work to illuminate the imaginative and virtual aspects of a place. What Augé calls non-places are not simply unfree, empty and alienating. They are underpinned by fantasies of vanguardism, of departure, flight and deferred arrival. They contain performative social relations, kinesthetic experiences and what geographers and anthropologists call the aesthetic and poetic dimensions of

infrastructure. These places are autopoetic systems that involve a contingent process of ordering and reordering.

Infrastructure and infrastructuralism

The planes of art, space, and form on which I consider Ballard's suburbia intersect on the plane of 'infrastructure' or 'infrastructuralism'. Krauss and Levine have unveiled the infrastructural basis of modern art, culture, and politics. Ballard's (sub)urban places are also the infrastructural basis of our urban landscape. The avant-garde mode of disruption and dislocation happens in his fiction as an infrastructural breakdown that allows us to scrutinize the complex collisions and interactions of forms in cultural systems. Ballard's work thus contributes to the expanding list of infrastructural studies participated by geographers, anthropologists, cultural theorists, and literary critics that emphasize the 'poetic' dimension of infrastructure.

Current research on infrastructure draws on the long tradition of studying forms, structures and systems underlying the phenomenal world (Benjamin, 1986; Latour,1993; Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Foucault, 2020). It is also joined by contemporary inquiry into media culture and cybernetics and speaks to an urgency to develop new methods to analyze power structures and complex networks in the digital age. Infrastructure gradually moves away from a functional object to a semiotic system, from an object of study to an analytical method. The ontology of infrastructure is marked by a duality - it is 'matter that enables the movement of other matter' and 'things and also the relation between things' (Larkin, 2013, p. 329). As a connective and distributive device featuring a system of relations, infrastructure has an aesthetic and poetic dimension.

Drawing on Roman Jacobson who defines the poetic mode of speech act as one in which the formality and palpability of the sign is more important than its reference, anthropologist Brian Larkin (2013) argues that infrastructures run on many levels concurrently. The forms in the infrastructure can be rearranged to highlight its poetic mode autonomous from its technical function. Aesthetics, before it is used to describe standards of beauty in art, refers to the experience of the world through the senses. The aesthetics of infrastructure, as Larkin (2013, p336) points out, refers to the way that the infrastructure produces 'ambient conditions of everyday life' through imbricating our body, mind and psyche. Our sense of self and our idea of

duty, freedom, modernity and progress are all condensed and situated in the material condition of infrastructure.

As the prefix 'infra', which means beneath, below, or within, suggests, infrastructure implies an inside/outside relationship. Including people, political structures, temporality and knowledge, infrastructure as a theory and method is used to examine the hidden aesthetic and poetic ordering of relations. While the foundational nature of infrastructure makes it hard to notice, infrastructural failure can offer a revisionist view of how these intricate systems work. To recognize the invisible power relations and unconscious energies coded in the semiotic system of infrastructure is a prerequisite for searching new political possibilities in urban reality. Infrastructuralism, a recently emerging perspective in critical theory investigating the intersection between literature and infrastructure, also uses moments of infrastructural breakdown as a revisionist device. Bruce Robbins (2007), for instance, holds that the inquiry into infrastructure starts from its bad smell, which redirects our belated attention to public facilities and their poor state under neoliberal privatization. Meanwhile, cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (2022) expands the meaning of infrastructure to incorporate institutions, economic structures and even the nation, and points out that a glitch in an infrastructure is not necessarily liberatory but can reinforce systematic ordering.

On the one hand, bringing the poetics and aesthetics of Ballard's fictions from the literary and artistic context to the urban context, I situate Ballard's works in a larger discussion of space and infrastructure. Ballard's works manifest a similar attention to the most prevalent yet overlooked infrastructures that seize our attention when they break down. The visceral effect of his texts awakens our senses to the quotidian material makeup of urban life. The moment of infrastructural breakdown re-sensitizes us to re-examine how urban life proliferates around infrastructures and what they do to us, i.e., how they reshape our cognition, emotion, psyche and subjectivity. As the facade of infrastructure's fixity and totalizing image is penetrated, it breaks into tangible forms to be realigned with the human body and reintegrated into human perceptual apparatus. The motorway, the high-rise, and gated community, so ubiquitous that they seem to possess a hegemonic power over urban life, are artificial, fragile, full of slippages, capable of being unmade and reordered. Ballard's engagement with Augéan 'non-places' goes beyond condemning these infrastructural forms as ubiquitous, unmappable, and invincible. Places are not fixed entities with pre-established affordances, but a combination of multiple forms and structures, capable of mutating and transcending contextual boundaries. Ballard's poetics of infrastructure also compose a language of forms that give us insight into the political nature of how they interact and collide. Rather than perceiving politics as disrupting forms, we can use the knowledge of forms to negotiate an alternative political reality.

On the other hand, I am also using infrastructure as a theory and analytical tool to address the unreadability of Ballard's texts. Ballard's body of work, repeating a set of themes, tropes, imageries, and characters which are interlinked, repetitive and self-enclosed, also has an infrastructural character. Within an individual text, the plot operates in an unbreakable loop; texts echo each other in seriality and through intertextuality. However, upon close examination, Ballard's 'flatness' and bad similes constantly generate unreadable moments that expose the artificial and contrived nature of his textual operations. The unreadability and impossibility of closure allows the readers to take aesthetic forms out of thetic and literary context and draw new relations with real time and space.

3. Chapter Breakdown

My thesis will focus on Ballard's work published from 1970s onwards, except for *Vermilion Sands,* and identify a gradual departure from Dali's paranoia-surrealism, in his increasingly claustrophobic texts that reshuffle a set of infrastructural spaces as literary tropes. The aesthetic appeal also dissipates in their prosaic blandness in his final quartet. The aesthetic shift parallels with suburbia's concretization in real geographies and its move towards concentric topologies. In the context of art history, my reading traces the recuperation of avant-gardism in post-war reconstruction, suburbanization and socio-political systems of neoliberalism and global capitalism. In the context of urban geography, the four chapters engage studies of automobility, architecture, suburb, and gated community and draws on Levine's analysis of bounded whole, hierarchy, rhythm, and network.

Chapter One focuses on the dialectic of mobility and immobility in suburbia. I read the motorway in *Crash* and *Concrete Island* as a grid form with a 'bivalent' structure: it is both centrifugal and centripetal and holds the driver/artist in an undecided position between mind and matter, science and mythology. In *Crash*, Vaughan's photography that refashions the motorway as an archive of wounds is both an investigative and a ritualistic project. In *Concrete Island*, as Maitland's footsteps transform the island into an open archive; its aesthetic disorder both allows for a primal encounter with the past and an instrumental reorganization of its resources around a colonial order. The unfinished archive of the body, history and reality is both illuminating and mystifying, both mobilizing and immobilizing. While Marc Augé's notion of the 'non-place' overemphasizes the isolation and unfreedom of the motorway, Ballard's fictions portray them as a 'motion sculpture', an enclosed structural realm of tactilely linked sequences. His texts anticipate a shifting perspective of automobility that reconfigures the motorway as an 'autopoetic' system.

Chapter Two focuses on the life/death of modernist architecture in suburbia. Drawing on Manfred Tarufi's thesis of 'death of architecture' and call for 'form without utopia', I will read the construction and destruction of the *High-Rise* building as dramatizations of two recuperation process of the avant-garde in capitalism. The short story 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista' anticipates a third recuperation process in architecture's cybernetic turn. On top of a cyclic view of history that traces the life/death of modernism, I also identify an interval of hope in 'form without utopia'. Drawing on contemporary thing theory and new materialism's look back at the historical avant-gardes, I read modernism's progressive politics as way of homemaking through reordering the subject-object relation.

Chapter Three talks about time as an infrastructure in suburbia. I will analyze what I call a 'twilight narrative' in *Vermilion Sands* and *The Unlimited Dream Company*. In the short stories collected in *Vermilion Sands* that repeat the same plot, the past rhythmically returns and is incorporated into the temporal structure of the present. The rhythmic arrhythmia is a temporal infrastructure that allows the suburbanites to sculpt time and dwell in history. In *The Unlimited Dream Company,* the suburban town of Shepperton is annihilated / united in the psychedelic vision of a Blakean hero. The suburbanites' metamorphosis happens in a processual temporal framework oriented towards an unknown future. In the enclosed form of time, 'tomorrow' is replaced by 'change', and 'end' is replaced by 'process'. The carnivalesque mode of transformation has an underlying reductive and totalitarian tendency. Both texts heavily draw on Romantic tropes and point to a deeper origin of the avant-garde in a larger intellectual transition in the nineteenth century.

Chapter Four focuses on 'infrastructural community' in globalized suburbs. I will analyze the interaction between network and the bounded whole in *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come*, two of Ballard's final quartet of crime fictions. Departing from the centre-peripheral model, globalized suburbs are no longer peripheral and secondary to urban centres. Rather, they are totalized forms and concentrated nodes around infrastructures that are embedded within and buttressing the growth of an ever-expanding global network. Analogous to the way crime fiction appeases social tensions by engaging the readers in navigational games, the gated community use a 'formalist politics' of banalized revolutions to perpetuate rather than subvert normative order.

Chapter One: Suburbia and Mobility in *Crash* and *Concrete Island*

In an article 'The Car, The Future' published in *Drive*, the magazine for the Automobile Association, Ballard (2023 [1971], p113-114) writes: 'If I were asked to condense the whole of the present century into one mental picture, I would pick a familiar everyday sight: a man in a motor car, driving along a concrete highway to some unknown destination'. Ballard's mental picture outlines a banalized image of vanguardism. The passenger-avant-gardes move collectively and unconsciously towards the future in a confined, mannequin-like position. The mental image summarizes the central logic of mobility/stasis and departure/deferred arrival in avant-gardism. I will analyze the motorway in *Crash* and *Concrete Island*, originally published in 1973 and 1974, in light of the 'bivalent' structure of photography and the modernist grid. The motorway is both a functional object and an enclosed relational field where identity can be reinvented. The car crash, an immanent force in the motorway sequence, transforms the motorway into a poetic motion sculpture and an open archive, which is both mobilizing and immobilizing. In the end of the chapter, I will talk about how Ballard's fictions amend Augé's conception of 'non-place' by unveiling the (kin)aesthetic relations between machines, bodies, and objects.

1. *Crash* and the Schizophrenic Photographer

Motion sculpture

James Ballard, the protagonist of *Crash* (1995[1973]) with the same name as the author, realizes he lives on 'a pleasant island' (48), 'placid suburban enclave' (48-49). Marooned on the *Concrete Island*, the protagonist Maitland also realizes his life is 'bounded by a continuous artificial horizon, formed by the raised parapets and embankments of the motorways and their access roads and interchanges. These encircled the vehicles below like the walls of a crater several miles in diameter' (24). This is a prosaic transcription of the surrealist visual field within which the individual is transported to the alien and distant through a process of likening based on purely geometric and visual relations. After James's crash, he observes that:

> The severed nerve in my scalp had fractionally lowered my right eyebrow, a built-in eye-patch that seemed to conceal my new character from myself. This marked tilt was evident in everything around me. I stared at my pale, mannequin-like face, trying to

read its lines. The smooth skin almost belonged to someone in a sf film, stepping out of his capsule after an immense inward journey on to the overlit soil of an unfamiliar planet (36).

The 'built-in eye-patch' recalls the eyeball-slitting scene in 'An Andalusian Dog', a 1929 surrealist short film. However, unlike the sliced eyeball that reveals newness through destructing a smooth, functional surface; the 'eye-patch' is created through remedying a violent opening. The tilted vision of surrealism that means to subvert the regulating, habituating and standardizing forces of modernity is reconfigured as a post-traumatic remedy of disorder and social debris. Rather than revealing, the eye-patch conceals. Mobilizing the unconscious energy, surrealism patches up the ruptured social fabric by taking an 'immense inward journey' in a 'capsule' away from the commonplace and the earthly. Excavating the overlit, fertile soil of the unfamiliar and the alien, it brings out and channels men's built-in drives and primal desires into a mobile flow.

In what Bürger calls the false sublation of art and life, the surrealist vision is now patched into the smooth skin of the spectacular consumer landscape, and its once defiant posture is now confined in a mannequin-like position. The protagonist, an uncanny double of the author, now belongs to the overlit realm of the science fiction film, the smoothened, overlit media landscape. The last sentence, awkwardly long, conflates surrealism's inward journey with science fiction's interstellar travel. Both have become smooth cartographies of inner space and outer space. Benjamin also identifies a similar mythical dimension in surrealism's iconography of the unconscious (Calderbank, 2003). Surrealism's treatment of dream as a reservoir of mythic consciousness, for Benjamin, demonstrates dangerous strains of vitalism and mysticism. He sees in Breton's 'First Manifesto' a revival of Romantic idealism that is preoccupied with the dissolution of ego and the rise of 'urbild', the primal image, in place of the structured world (Calderbank, 2003, p4). The imagist imagination of the world has once led the Youth movement to welcome the First World War and has continued to play a part in Nazi ideology.

Ballard's text operates in the space between the avant-garde art's failed attempt to revolutionize the world and its smooth flow into the post-war landscape. His dialectical text captures history's cyclic patterns with a patched, uneven texture. An imprecise surgeon and not so smooth 'scientist on safari', he uses similes to bridge and connect the past and the future

and exposes their discontinuity. An awkward actor, he impersonates the avant-garde impulse, mimicking its recalcitrant gesture against the realm of phantasmagoria, 'gesturing' towards the future while looking back at the past. His sentences are long, contrived, and awkwardly linked by bad similes, taking detours, and leading us to a place we recognize as new, but is not. The journey the surrealist hero takes to the alien planet is the journey to suburbia, which is both a distant holiday resort, and a familiar home.

Ballard refuses to describe his motorways and deserted car parks as places of decay and entropy. Rather, he calls them 'psychic zero stations', where his characters are able 'to make something positive out of the chaos that surrounds him, to create some sort of positive mythology that can sustain one's confidence in the world' (Sellars and O' Hara, 2012, p452). The 'psychic zero station' is reminiscent of the 'ground zero' of the modernist grid, which for Krauss (1986, p157) is the working station of modern art that draws on the photographic vision. Drawing on Lévi-Strauss's structuralist reading of myth, Krauss argues that the grid-based art shares the structure of mythology. Both are spatially constructed and shuffle around basic structures. In her essay 'Grids', originally published in 1979, Krauss (1986, p12) argues that the success of the grid in twentieth century avant-garde art comes from such a mythical, 'bivalent' structure (1986, p12): 'The grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction)'. With a 'beyond the frame' attitude, one may use it to address the structure of the world and its materialist, scientific aspects; seen with a 'within the frame' perspective, a work of art appears 'symbolic, cosmological, spiritual, vitalist' (Krauss, 1986, p21). In a centrifugal reading, the work of art compels the reader to acknowledge a world beyond the frame. In a centripetal reading, the work of art is a mapping of reality separate from the ambience of the world. The grid's inherently schizophrenic structure 'allows a contradiction between the values of science and those of spiritualism to maintain themselves within the consciousness of modernism, or rather its unconscious, as something repressed' (Krauss, 1986, p13).

Ballard's suburbia is the spatial form of the grid, of which the motorway is a variation. As photography destructs the aura of objects by bringing them closer, the motorway makes

objects, people, time, and space more accessible by collaging them into a sculpted form. Akin to photography's semiotic field, the motorway is also an 'elaborately signaled landscape' (50).

Marc Augé's (1995) theory of the 'non-place', framing the motorway as both a transitory, linkage point (out-of-the-frame perspective) and a self-enclosed linguistic system (within-the-frame perspective), has illustrated its 'bivalent', schizophrenia structure. Augé views the motorway rather negatively and emphasizes the sense of confinement, emptiness, sensorial sterility, and boredom experienced by the traveler. For Augé, the anonymous travelers, traversing these in-between places only momentarily and communicating with texts and signs rather than with each other, are unable to forge meaningful, permanent relations with either place or people. They circulate as indistinct, interchangeable particles in a collective within a totalized system. Their alienation and segregation in a streamlined order also calls to mind the sequestered solitude in the panopticon which is theorized by Michel Foucault in his influential work *Discipline and Punish* (2020[1975]). In his spatial analysis of Jeremy Bentham's ideal prison, the panopticon, Foucault points out that the architecture achieves its maximum efficiency and functionality through its spatial design: an annular building that keeps offenders in cellular cells with a tower in the centre. While the inmates are transparent to the centre of surveillance, the central tower is invisible to the inmates on the peripheral. The cell is transformed into a theatrical space and 'visibility is a trap' (Foucault, 2020, p200). As the architectural apparatus also renders power unverifiable, it becomes an efficient surveillance machine that can do without a real watchman. Power passes from a central sovereign figure to an architectural form that organizes visual relations. The panoptic schema then becomes a generalizable and multipliable model, 'the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form' (Foucault, 2020, p205). The modularity and efficiency of the panoptic form lends to its wide application in the technological systems of modern institutions. Disciplinary power thus infiltrates the individual body on a 'capillary' level through monitoring and managing it in a homogeneous system (Foucault, 2020, p198).

Foucault (2020, p205) sees the panoptic model as 'a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another'. The distributive system has an increasingly invisible disciplinary power. Individuals are systematically distributed and

evaluated. The mechanical system imposes a strict ordering on the individual body and administers its desires. Underneath the egalitarian pretensions of freedom, corporeal domination and normalization are hidden from view. The 'non-place' seems to be another variant of the panoptic schema, which Foucault sees as the elementary modular form that becomes the basis for the technological systems in society of control. Like the panopticon, the motorway infrastructure confines the solitary man in a mannequin position in his car, tacitly following the order in a state of self-surveillance. The proliferation of 'non-places' that marks the age of supermodernity is also comparable to the wide application of the panoptic schema. The peripheral site where Bentham's panopticon is located would also be a suburban 'non-place' for Augé. It is also an apolitical site. As the heterogenous subjects are sequestered in solitude, they are unable to merge, mingle and come together as a political entity.

While Augé's 'non-place' stresses the confining and repressive aspect of the motorway and its apolitical nature, Reyner Banham celebrates Los Angeles's freeway system in *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971) precisely because of its lack of distinctness. The bounded form of the motorway contains as well as confines (Levine, 2015). The isolated territory serves as a safe arena for the free flow of speed and desire. In the motopia envisioned in the 1950s and 1960s, the motorway rises as another dream image of smooth, unimpeded mobility. The construction of the motorway, accompanying the resurgence of brutalism, recuperates historical avant-garde's search for freedom in a grid form. In the anonymous, grid space of the motorway, one is free to reinvent social relations and personal identity in a ground zero station. The anonymity of the traveler corresponds to the non-originality of the artist. The suburban enclave and the anonymous collective of commuters correspond to the collective authorship of grid artists. In the same way that the structure of the unconscious gives rise to repetitions of the same conflicts, the motorway's mythic structure also allows the driver to repeat primal conditions suppressed in modern consciousness. As Ballard (2011, p3) writes in the preface to *Concrete Island*, 'there are all the fascinating problems of survival' and 'the challenge of returning to our more primitive natures'. The motorway and the concrete island have become 'out-stations of the psyche, as they must have done for our primeval forbears, filled with lures and pitfalls of every kind' (Ballard, 2011, p3).

Seen with a within-the-frame perspective, the motorway is a symbolic realm where the travelers experience the spiritual and the cosmological through passively succumbing to an internal order in a relational sequence.   As James waits in a southward queue along the Western Avenue, he becomes aware that 'an immense silence hung over the landscape around [him]'. The functional motorway is refashioned as a poetic image, a 'serene motion sculpture of the concrete' (6) with a serene, tranquil and mythical appeal. The moment of queuing and stoppage enhances a centripetal reading of the motorway as an enclosed semiotic realm. As Gillian Fuller (2014, p206) points out, queuing is 'a singularity that captures the motion of a multitude and directs it into a sequence'. The queuer moves in a relational field in a state of docility experiencing a 'time out'. A queue 'produces a singular yet collective subjectivity based on serialization' and establishes 'one (identity) in relation to another one (identity)' (Fuller, 2014, p210). Fuller (2014, p211) relates the docile state of the queuer to that of a prisoner and a soldier in 'a shared architecture of inputs, menus and commands that are so mutually implicative that they are no longer generated by the outside'. Rather than accepting disciplinary demands from the outside, the queuers receive intimate prompts from the enclosed wall. They concomitantly succumb to and are united by an invisible discipline emerging from within, experiencing the mythical / illusional /fictitious in the functional / mundane. Similarly, in communications systems, the individuals are in a 'distracted' state as their habits, precepts and body are plugged into a field of action (Terranova, 2004, cited in Fuller, 2014, p208). The motorway, as well as the communication system, shape an autocratic suburban enclave akin to Fuller's queue: it is a public infrastructure with 'no clear protagonist' and no 'government responsible' for it (2014, p210).

The motorway is a 'motion sculpture'. The drivers are 'gathering of people in relational motion' in a half-distracted state. In organizing motion into a static and stable form, and in containing discontinuous experiences in a controllable form, it puts to stop the state of flux. The drivers experience the ambience of the modern in a comfortable, habitualized position. Moving in the 'unmoving world' (48) stiffly like 'a party of mannequins' (4), the drivers in *Crash* also experience a sense of destiny, belonging, and freedom in pre-assigned, centrally allocated positions in an enormous queue, following a tacit connection with an anonymous

collective and an aesthetic, sensual unity with the environment. In the motion sculpture of the motorway, they re-experience the primal, infantile connection to the external world, balancing risk and control. As James reflects, 'the crash is the only real experience [he] had been through for years' and 'for the first time [he] was in physical confrontation with [his] own body' (39). Lying in the hospital and being attended to like an infant, he notices 'the contrast between this generous pose and the glass curtain-walling of the airport buildings, the showroom glitter of the new car' (66); the geometry of the airplane connected to 'the slopes and contours' of young women (27); the 'angular control surfaces' in the car cabin interacting with 'rounded sections of human bodies'(80); 'The elegant aluminized air-vents' become 'warmest organic orifice' (41) overlaying flyovers become 'copulating giants' (76). In James's eroticized vision, the motorway landscape transforms into a sensory field of contingent relationality where bodily and spatial forms intersect, and the inner and outer space meet and fuse.

The interpenetration and coordination of body and space also features in artist and sculptor Barbara Hepworth's (1970, p9) phenomenological accounts of the West Riding landscape: 'there was the sensation of moving physically over the contours of fullness and concavities, through hollows and over peaks – feeling, touching, seeing, through mind and hand and eye… I, sculptor, am the landscape. I am the form and I am the hollow, the thrust and contour'. The landscape does not precede the subject. It is sculpted by the motion of driving. The car is also more than a functional object, but a sculpturing device and an extension of the body. Sociologists and geographers (Featherstone, Thrift and Urry, 2005, p13) also note how 'people respond to the thrum of the engine, the smell of the interior, the feel of the car seat, given that the kinaesthetic (awareness of position and body motion through sensory organs) pleasures of the car ride are often experienced from infancy onwards'. The pleasure of being in the car and feeling the landscape beneath and around is one that is somewhat infantile. Likewise, Maitland is constantly compared to a child 'at play' in an 'imaginary empty garden' (17). Moreover, as the infant often mistakes the object of touch as part of himself, the driver could consider himself or herself as part of the car and the landscape he or she embodies and cruises along. Hepworth's 'I am the landscape' calls to mind Maitland's declaration 'I am the

island' (71). The infantile connotations point to an unmediated and originary experience of space through the body.

In Fuller's (2014, p209) centripetal reading, queuing has a photographic quality. It is a revelatory and cartographic device that provides a 'diagram of how bodies and bits, people and structures move relationally'. Queuing reveals the way the motorway rearranges bodies and reconfigures sporadic movements into direction and sequence. It is not a refusal of and resistance to mobility, but integral to it. In a similar fashion, the car crash also brushes the motorway sequence against its grain. Vaughan's aesthetic play and permutational sex act in the car is another form of motion-sculpting. Compulsively rehearsing car crashes, he uses it as a revisionist device to reveal the complex relationality between the body, material and space. In the following scene, James drives the car and observes from the rear mirror how Vaughan performs a series of ritualistic sex acts with two prostitutes they hire on the highway.

> I realized that I could almost control the sexual act behind me by the way in which I drove the car. Playfully, Vaughan responded to different types of street furniture and roadside trim. As we left London Airport, heading inwards towards the city on the fast access roads, his rhythm became faster, his hands under the girl's buttocks forcing her up and down as if some scanning device in his brain was increasingly agitated by the high office blocks (144).

Vaughan manipulates the girl's body as if operating a machine, at a speed and rhythm that is responsive to the flow of the traffic. The stylized sex act mimics how our mobile practices are staged and performed with props and gestures. The interior space of the car also becomes a grid form that orders the disparate parts of the body into a relational sequence. During driving, the driver's body is 'fragmented and disciplined to the machine, with eyes, ears, hands and feet, all trained to respond instantaneously and consistently' (Urry et al, 2006, p127). The seat manipulates the hand, feet and the pelvis into fixed positions. The instrument panel guides drivers to control the speed. The eyes are obliged to shift between the windscreen and the rear mirrors. The feet switch between the brake and the accelerator. The drivers' consciousness is preoccupied and directed to choosing lanes, junctions, deciding pace, keeping distances with other cars, in an intimate interaction with codes and road signs. The driver experiences the multiplicity and medley of disjunct elements of the landscape in a rhythmic pattern.

According to mobilities scholar Mimi Sheller (2004, p222), the driver is 'an emotional agent' who 'instantiates particular aesthetic orientations and kinaesthetic dispositions towards driving'. The psychological and emotive factors of driving, i.e., the tactile, sensuous experience of car interior, the pleasure of watching the landscape unfolding in car windows, feelings of security, freedom and pride associated with owning a car, are all crucial aspects of people's various affective investments in cars that are easily overshadowed by economic, rational considerations. Sheller (2004) further points out that the geographical methodology focuses on transpersonal automotive emotions, and in other words, how they are naturalized, universalized, and enter the collective unconscious. The ultimate goal is to delineate the cultural patterns, emotional economies and affective geographies that emerge from and feed back into common car consumption. Vaughan's project, which brings to light many ways in which driving is a kinaesthetic, affective and multisensory performance on the visual and soundscapes of the motorway, is also such a scientific, investigative project.

Vaughan's act is not transgressive because formless /structureless / purposeless. What seems a disorderly and aleatory play is governed by a secret logic. His driving is a sculpted motion and a ritualized act. The function or purpose of his highly technical operations is to imbricate the body with materials and embed the individual into the flux of life. Coordinating his driving with the ambient landscape, he is compared to an 'acrobat', whose skillset is built on large quantities of repetitive practices.

> Vaughan lay back, inspecting her small features with a detached gaze, looking her body up and down like an acrobat calculating the reverses and impacts of a gymnastic feat involving a large amount of complex equipment (140).

The motion sculpture of the motorway is one of the avant-garde's aesthetic grids. Vaughan's ambiguous act typifies the modernist avant-garde's impulse, which for Jacques Ranciere (2004), is to invent form and structures for a life to come. Between 'autonomy' (self-rule) and 'heteronomy' (being ruled), the contradictory poles of the avant-garde's anticipatory aesthetics (Ranciere, 2004, p29), Vaughan's play is both governed by the ordering of the motorway and means to control its flow. In a contingent play with the 'elaborately signalled landscape', he operates between chance and control in an active / receptive state. The acrobatic nature of Vaughan's driving practices makes him kindred to Proctor in *Concrete Island,*

whose gymnastic exercises involve 'an elaborate ritual of puffing and panting like the start-up of an old gas engine' (93). Even Proctor's physique bears similarities with that of Vaughan. Both their bodies are a work of operational mishaps and mechanical violence.

> The silver strips showed off his powerful shoulders and revealed the livid scar that ran like a lightning bolt from the back of his right ear down his neck to his shoulder, the residue of some appalling act of violence (Ballard, 2011: 93).

Vaughan and Proctor fit with Steven Connor's (2008) interpretation of a 'wire-walker.' For Connor (2008, [no pagination]), wire walking 'thickens the infinitesimally thin itinerary of the wire into a habitat' and its destiny is 'an indefinite deferral of destination'. As the line thickens into two planes, a performative stage is created. In the same way, Vaughan's stunts and Proctor's acrobatic tricks thicken the motorway and the traffic island, both functional linkages, to a dramatic stage. Casting a spotlight on the infrastructure that is designed to attract the least attention possible, they reveal that the coordinated movement on the motorway is built on endless rehearsals, stylized feats and calibrated acts that harness the body's unknown capacities.

Optical unconscious and mythology

Baudrillard (1991) reads *Crash* as an illustration of simulacra where the 'real' disappears into the free circulation of images. Baxter contends that the postmodernist reading of *Crash* that ignores the material dimension in the text is itself symptomatic of the affectless media landscape that Ballard indicts. On the contrary, she (2008, p508) draws on Benjamin's 'A Small History of Photography' (1931) and associates Vaughan's project with the constructive practices of Surrealist photography. For Benjamin, photography illuminates the 'optical unconscious' hidden in everyday reality, in the same way that psychoanalysis illuminates instinctual unconscious hidden beneath consciousness. Vaughan's photography, for Baxter (2009, p104) constructs a 'tableau of mutilated flesh and burning metal' in line with surrealist Georges Bataille's notion of '*informe*' (formlessness) and 'vulgar materialism' that unveil the deaths and casualties hidden beneath official narratives. For Baxter (2008a, p516), Vaughan is a 'compulsive cartographer of would culture', composing 'a textual palimpsest of concealed historical narratives' with his photomontage. Baxter's reading has overlooked what Krauss

(1999a) calls photography's 'theoretical' turn. In Krauss's (1999a) alternative review of the history of photography, as I elaborated on in the introduction, she points out that photography's exit from the early stage as a historical, aesthetic object is irreversible. In *Work of Art*, Krauss (1999a) argues Benjamin is only interested in photography as a theoretical object used by the surrealists to the perform a surgical operation on reality by blasting reality open, unrolling its content, and exposing its geometric and structural underpinnings. Photography's theoretical turn, for Krauss, has been realized in and has prepared impetus for its 'dark' turn to Barthes's *Mythologies*, together with Baudrillard's *Simulacra*. Vaughan's practice echoes Krauss's observation and illustrates the continuity between this shift. His surrealist art that draws on the theoretical mode of photography is inherently machinic, schizophrenic, immobilizing, and mythologizing.

Sharing the 'bivalent' structure of the motorway, Vaughan's photoart is both surrealist historiography and mythology. He is, in Benjamin's (1986 [1940], p262) words, a 'historical materialist' who 'remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history' and allow us to see the past. Documenting the crash accidents with a camera, Vaughan's photography reproduces the motorway as an archive of wounds. With experimental visual techniques, he explores strange angles and unusual junctions between the body, the car and the motorway. They reemerge as traces and signifiers in a broken text governed by a set of visual and geometric relations. Following an impulse unknown to himself, Vaughan is a half-conscious player in the semiotic realm: 'All of us who knew Vaughan *accept* the perverse eroticism of the car crash, as painful as the drawing of an exposed organ through the aperture of a surgical wound' (17, italics mine). 'Aperture' is the opening in a photographic lens that admits the light. As Benjamin (1985) accounts, the enlarged camera lens allows the coming in of light to illuminate reality and reveal its traces. Vaughan's crash, sexual intercourse and photography simultaneously perform such penetration and illumination. However, mutilating his own body in ritualistic crash-sex, the surgeon and the patient are one. His vivisection of the 'brutal, erotic and overlit realm' of the motorway landscape (2) is not an inventive, agentive practice operating outside the logic of the motorway. Rather, as he illuminates the motorway,

he also embodies its palimpsestic space and is caught up in its internal relations and recursive structures.

Vaughan's photography invites us to look back at history in the posture of Paul Klee's surrealist painting 'Angelus Novus', the angel of history is also caught up in the wind of history. In Benjamin's description in 'On the Concept of History', the angel of history is in an immobilized, backward posture:

> A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (Benjamin, 1968[1940], p257)

As the angel of history is helplessly caught up in the wind and unable to close its wings, Ballard/Vaughan is trapped in the angle between two walls and seat belts. Ballard's/Vaughan's historiography is a flattened image that pronounces its own reductive nature and highlights the immobility of the historiographer in mobilizing the optical unconscious. Embedded in the motorway as a personification of the 'death drive', Vaughan is only 'accepting' and 'unconsciously' following an impulse for reordering and disturbance, deformation and defamiliarization. He is an 'angel of death' operating in the mode of the accidental and eruptive. In *The Arcades Projects*, Benjamin describes the way history is 'suddenly emergent' in a 'dialectical image'. In the dialectical image, time stops and becomes a tableau or 'dialectics in a standstill'.

> It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather…what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation…the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent (Benjamin, 1999, p462).

In Benjamin's account, the dialectical image is a synthetic constellation that rises from an accidental moment. The tableau is also a 'motion sculpture'. The 'dialectical image' defies easy categorization and disorients the viewer. Its meaning needs to be mediated by language.

Roland Barthes (cited in Krauss,1999a, p290) draws out the darker implications of photography's 'structural irony'. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes (1993, p87) acknowledges that photography presents the past to the present spectator as the 'that-has-been'; it utters a 'prophecy in reverse' and invites the spectator to cast a backwards looking at reality from the future. However, the 'optical unconscious' for Benjamin is for Barthes a '*punctum'* -- 'a small, distinct point' and an incidental detail that 'pricks' and 'wounds' the viewers in a personal and ineffable way. In the backward-looking posture, the viewers are passively crushed by the weight of history and the return of collective human experiences and emotions. The *punctum* is a reminder of death, provoking a personal emotional response which cannot be easily articulated. The ineffability and unreadability of the *punctum* invites the participation of interpretation, fiction, and mythology. The return of the past brings about a new form of re-enchantment and mythologization.

Both Benjamin's 'optical unconscious' and Barthes's '*punctum'* feature the 'accidental'. The past awaits the eye of a future reader. History emerges only in a deferred moment of recognition. Vaughan's photography also captures the past in the 'accidental'. The accident of the car crash creates a 'time capsule', a repository of memories in disjunct order. After James's car accident with Helen, the scattered personal possessions in his crashed car are isolated from the past and take on new meaning in juxtaposition: 'the isolation of these pieces of our lives, as if intact memories and intimacies had been taken out of doors and arranged by a demolition squad, was part of the same remaking of the commonplace' (52). In Vaughan's photographic documentation of crash sites, he preserves the 'accidental' in an archive of broken forms. Unrolling the contents of cars, bodies and roads, his series of still images comprise of random and compulsively repetitive intersections of human and machinic forms. Collaging a constellation of personal traces, he is both a surrealist photographer in Benjamin's scenario, authenticating the past by illuminating the optical unconscious, and a crash victim in Barthes's scenario, 'wounded' by the return of the past and the unreadability of the *punctum*. Like the serene motion sculpture of the motorway in the moment of queuing, Vaughan's photography also has a mythical aura. Photography as historiography entraps and wounds the readers as well as illuminates.

Vaughan's crash album is a compilation of what Barthes (1970, p44) calls 'stills' that generate an obtuse 'third meaning' in the filmic sequence that needs to be read in relation to the rest of the diegetic space. Rather than performing disruption / subversion, the photographic still only *exposes* the mechanical and permutational operations behind the narrative unity and symbolic efficacy of the film. Vaughan's photographic images remake the commonplace through creating a stoppage in the fluid sequence of the traffic. His photographic stills need to be read in relation to its 'diegetic horizon' and ironically calls for a reader/participator to join him as a schizophrenic counterpart. In the novel, James is constantly observing Vaughan in the rear mirror, as a spectator of his act and interpreter of its meaning. The performative stage is also a game space that awaits future participants. As the novel progresses, Vaughan's cultish practice is drawing in an expanding group of disciple crash victims.

Along the lines of Barthes, Krauss sees photography as a copy of reality and an archive of unreadable indexes that cannot speak for themselves. A photograph is 'the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface' (Krauss, 1977, p75). By the technological manipulation of light, reality is copied and replicated as an archive of indexes that invites the participation of language. In *Crash*, the body also becomes 'medium'. It acts as a sensitive film 'imprinted' by illegible marks: 'In my left knee the scars above my fractured patella exactly replicated the protruding switches of the windshield wipers and parkings lights' (45). These unique marks and signals are impossible to read outside their seriality and the new possibilities they embody remain unknown: 'The wounds on my knees and chest were beacons tuned to a series of beckoning transmitters, carrying the signals, unknown to myself, which would unlock this immense stasis and free these drivers for the real destinations set for their vehicles, the paradise of the electric highway' (53). On the one hand, the mutilated body becomes a grid form, a fragment of a larger world that tends towards infinity. It opens space for infinite possibilities of new permutations. On the other hand, never specifying what these 'signals' mean and what these 'real' destinations are, Ballard's teasingly extended prose leads the readers on without delivering them anywhere, analogous to the way that images circulate endlessly in the realm of simulacra out of touch with reality.

Both Vaughan's camera and Ballard's writing relentlessly generate photographic images with a mythical quality: 'An icy nimbus was gathering around the roof of my skull, like the clouds that form in the hangars of spacecraft' (89). The imagery mirrors the way photograph uses unusual angles and collage techniques to destruct the aura of objects by bringing them closer. To illustrate the concept of aura with reference to historical objects, Benjamin's 'Work of Art' draws an analogy with the aura of natural objects:

> We define the aura of [natural objects] as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch (1968[1936], p222).

As one follows one's eyes to look on the mountain and the branch in the distance, the shadows they cast in the sunlight brings them close and allow one to experience their 'aura' as 'distance'. The camera imitates the movement of the eye. The light that enters the camera lens casts 'traces' and 'indexes' on the surface of objects and brings them closer to its viewer. In Ballard's simile, the nimbus and the clouds are Benjamin's 'shadow'. They each bring close what lies deep within – the skull and what hangs far away - the spacecraft for contemplation. Photography allows the viewer access to both the inner and outer space. On another level, the simile also performs a surgery on reality by bringing close two irrelevant images - the skull and the spacecraft - and compressing them into a dialectical image. The 'unreadable' sentence is a photographic image that 'wounds' its reader. The past and the future are united; the inner and outer space are conflated into a smooth surface. The wounds end up concealing rather than revealing. These inherently illegible marks tend towards premature unity in dream image and mythical wholeness. The driver moving to an unknown destination in an anticipatory posture ends up being stranded in a mythical past.

Repeating the motif of self-mutilation and sacrificial rituals in surrealism, Vaughan dreams of his own crash death with Elizabeth Taylor 'at the moment of her orgasm' (9). Echoing the episode of his crash death in the opening scene, the novel ends with an image of the 'unceasing flow' of traffic and the rise of aircraft from the runways 'carrying Vaughan's semen to the instrument panels and radiator grilles of a thousand crashing cars, the leg stances of a million passengers' (224). The ascending motion and the spread of the remnants

of Vaughan's body both mirror the rhythm of the traffic and suggest transcendence from it. Indeed, the imagery has been read in both ways (Baudrillard, 1991; Youngquist, 2000). I suggest that the 'dispersion' of Vaughan's body parts into the spatial logic and material construct of the cityscape expresses a political desire for immortality which is embedded in both photography and the motorway infrastructure.

As photography blasts open the continuum of history, the subject is embedded within its historical and material conditions. Vaughan's camera also blasts open time and turns it into a disjunct form and disorderly sequence punctuated by gaps and stills, dramatizing the transitional stages and momentary stillness between frames. Emplacing himself in these 'holes' between the past and the future, he inserts himself anonymously into the palimpsest as an interchangeable mark in the serialized unity. Like Vaughan, James wishes to embed his accident within the geological layer of the past: 'Beneath this new geological layer laid down by the age of the automobile accident would be my own small death, as anonymous as a vitrified scar in a fossil tree' (57). Layered and enfolded into history's archive of wounds, his personal death is commemorated and embalmed into eternity. 'Vitrification' is a chemical process where a substance melts and cools rapidly and embedded into glass matrix. The motorway is such a man-made operation played against the nature's automatic cycle; it is a contingently composed, artificially built object and an artificial trace embedded within nature's geological past. Vaughan's imbrication into history and his attempt to blur the line between the high and the low, the near and the far, the private and the public echoes photography's political potential.

Here I draw on Benjamin's friend, Hanna Arendt's concept of the political as '*vita activa*', 'life of action', which is spelled out in *The Human Condition* (2018[1958], p7). Arendt's book takes similar impetus to that of Ballard. Both react to the Soviet Union's satellite Sputnik, the

first artificial Earth satellite that brought back images of the earth from space, realizing humanity's twofold dream of mobility and spectatorship. Ballard (2023 [1974], p12) claims his fiction responds to 'the context of the 50s, in a world where the call sign of Sputnik 1 could be heard on one's radio like the advance beacon of a new universe'. Arendt takes up as her subject the ambivalent prospects of new space technologies and attempts to, as Danielle Allen (2018, ix) writes in the preface, 'restore human authority over it'. Like Ballard, Arendt embraces the power of technology to liquidize traditional ethical values. Meanwhile, she problematizes the mechanical and algorithmic logic in scientific thinking that ruptures the linguistic fabric human beings depend on to give meaning to life. Channeling Aristotle's *vita activa*, Arendt reintroduces words and speech into the concept of the political. Set against the private realm - the realm of *oikos* (home), and against concepts of nature, necessity, functionality, muteness, darkness and repetition, the political realm is a place of light and revelation. In the political sphere of publicity and visibility, the irreplaceable uniqueness of being unfolds and each individual unveils him/herself through speech and action, through being heard and being seen by the other. Compared to Foucault's 'visibility is trap', Arendt's politics harnesses the redemptive potential in new technology that allows for new visibility and relationality.

In light of Arendt's idea, *Crash* is underpinned by a desire to mobilize a new way of political thinking to navigate the uncertain media and motorway landscape. Possessing a 'strong vision of the automobile and its real role in our lives' (29), Vaughan plays the role of a messiah, a mediator and harbinger of the utopian future in such technological innovation. His project blurs the line between art, life and politics and reconfigure them as a performative stage, where action and perception/representation are conflated: action enacts a way of being spectated; Identity is constructed through language; a new marking or imprint becomes an act that initiates a new beginning. Politics happens in a relational field as a way of ordering. Vaughan's project remedies the linguistic fabric in the depoliticized realm that has been ruptured by the algorithmic and mathematical logic of Spectacle. In the streamlined flow of traffic defined by functionality, the personal itinerary is submerged in the collective itinerary and becomes a naturalized cycle, or a second cycle of nature. Vaughan's crash intersects the naturalized cycle of the motorway itinerary. Seeking a head-on crash with the immortal icon,

Elizabeth Taylor, his itinerary brings the private realm to intersect with the public. Vaughan's itinerary composes what Arendt (2018, p19) calls 'a recognizable life-story from birth to death' which 'rises out of biological life'. His journey 'is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, … cuts through the circular movement of biological life' (Arendt, 2018, p19). Vaughan realizes his capacity for immortal deed by leaving 'non-perishable traces behind' (Arendt, 2018. P19). Politics, as Arendt argues, responding to the natality and mortality of the human condition, initiates new beginnings. The overlit realm of media culture and the motion sculpture of the motorway also contains the capacity for political action and for initiating new beginnings.

2. *Concrete Island* and the Undecided *Flaneur*

In *Concrete Island* (2011 [1974]), the compulsive cartographer of wounds on the horizontal plane of the motorway descends vertically onto a traffic island under intersecting motorways. Compare these two quotes in *Crash* and *Concrete Island*:

> '*Long* spurs of pain reached along the inner surface of my thighs into my groins' (Ballard, 1995, p26, italics mine).

> '*Deep* spurs of pain reached from his hip into his groin and buttocks' (Ballard, 2011, p19, italics mine).

In *Crash*, history is inscribed in wounds (inside bodies) and unveiled through the surgical and mechanical operation of car crash and the penetrative camera lens. In *Concrete Island*, the island that Maitland is stranded on consists of a vertical pile of ruins. The island is tucked underneath the plane of automobility and hosts two underprivileged and overlooked members of society – prostitute Jane and tramp Proctor. It also contains the primitive, subterranean energies in the underbelly of our culture. Exploring the structural blind spot and reading its vertical ruins, Maitland is imbricated with the island in his proud exclamation: 'I am the island' (71).

As a spatial 'wound' folded within the motorway, the island acts as a *punctum* to the smooth plane above and a painful reminder of 'that has been'. It is both the past and future of the motorway. The waste land is much older than the motorway landscape that surrounds it and

will continue to exist after the latter 'collapse[s] into dust' (46). The island allows us to project an archaeological look back at the motorway from its distant future and reminds us of the transience and finiteness of life.

Ballard writes in the introduction to the novel: 'At an even deeper level there is the need to dominate the island and transform its anonymous terrain into an extension of our minds' (3). The revelation of its past also brings back our primal desire for domination that persists across time and reveals the deeply seated colonial logic of the motorway infrastructure. As a structural waste of motorway landscaping, the island illuminates the history and origin of the motorway in its unplanned condition. Maitland's dwelling on the island illuminates the primitivist fantasies and predatory desires hidden in the motorway landscape. By descending into the geographical depth of the untrodden island, he has also descended into the depth of automobile psychology, the fantasy of control and exploitation. Maitland's survival story is a mythological prequel to the birth of motorway culture - a primal encounter with wilderness to dominate it. His car, a Jaguar, is a technological augmentation of his physique. In his recuperation, his body becomes an assemblage of his derelict car: 'The hip joint appeared to have been driven into the basin of his pelvis, and the displaced nerves and blood-vessels throbbed through the torn musculature as they tried to reassemble themselves' (18). The fantasy of predatory greatness is also a masculine fantasy: 'Masculine fantasies and feelings of omnipotence crystallize about the automobile [so that] adults can again dream, as they did when they were children, of being larger than life' (Sachs, 1992, pp113-115).

As the car crash is an immanent moment of stoppage in motorway sequence, the island is a geographical expression of the deeply seated alienation in connectivity, immobility in mobility. As Maitland unconsciously crashes onto the waste island, he feels he has 'exited' the plane of reality. In a moment of stoppage or 'time out' and in his stranded state, he starts to reflect on the rhythm and patterns of his prior life.

> Given the peculiar topography of the island, its mantle of deep grass and coarse shrubbery, and the collection of ruined vehicles, there was no certainty that he would ever be noticed at all. Given, too, the circumstances of his private and professional life,

that once-so-convenient division between his wife and Dr. Helen Fairfax, it might be at least a week before anyone was sufficiently suspicious to call the police (28).

The invisibility of the island is 'given' by its material and spatial relations. Similarly, Maitland's life is structured around a convenient division that renders him free and mobile. Through the motorway, urban life is constructed into a rhythm juggling between social ties. As geographer Wolfgang Sachs (1992, p29) points out, driving is 'the desire for change and emancipation is objectified in the automobile [...] the pleasure in distance relies on the fantasy that out there at an appropriate distance a completely different life beckons'. Maitland maintains an elastic distance from all social ties with easy travel, and to be what Sachs calls 'a master over time and space', and 'an individual as king'. Alternating between his wife and his mistress, Maitland organizes his life around an emotional vacuum. His crash onto the island illuminates the embedded isolation in his well-connected life, which is perfectly embodied in the topographic features of the island as a suburbia– it is 'sealed off from the world around it' (13) under three converging motorway routes. He has, indeed, been 'on an island long before [he] crashed here' (98). Automobility enables the separation as well as connection of workplaces and home, of city centres, residential compounds and business districts in urban planning. It shapes a different time-space structure where individuals remain isolated and alienable in order to be freely juggling around schedules. As driving is an escapist fantasy, the island also provides a permanent shelter where the structural/topographical autonomy of his life can be maintained and stabilized.

In a centrifugal reading, the island is a material waste and a structural blind spot that buttresses an infrastructural system. Crashed onto the island, Maitland perceives it as an empty place in a forgotten, neglected, and outmoded state, merely an 'outside' to his everyday life and to the capitalist mode of functional productivity. The moment he crashes onto the island, he inspects it as such: 'a small traffic island, some two hundred yards long and triangular in shape, that lay in the waste ground between three converging motorway routes' (4). In his delirious state, however, the rationalist and functional observation of its topology soon gives way to a defamiliarized surrealist vision in which the island appears formless. In a centripetal reading, the island is an idyllic, imaginary garden for spiritual regeneration. Like the 'grid' that has no centre, no narrative, no hierarchy, no original creator,

the island has no pre-ordained sequences to follow. The earth flows 'like a warm, alluvial river' (8). The slope is too 'sliding' and 'powdery' (8) to climb on. The psychological dissolution and the idyllic imagery recall romanticist oneness with nature. The experience and perception of the island – its softness, arhythmic and unnavigable character – is in sharp contrast with Maitland's everyday rhythms before his crash. 'Already the waist-high grass, marked by the winding corridors that recorded his uncertain movements around the car, was settling itself again' (8). Maitland is passively and attentively led by the grass into various corridors and rites of passage. Like the avant-garde flaneur aimlessly strolling in urban space for redemptive potentials, Maitland's passive navigation on the island is also therapeutic: it is a 'time out' from the struggle and hardship of managing his social ties.

In the same way that Vaughan's photographic stills provide a revisionist view of the motorway, the island provides a vantage point outside the traffic where Maitland is more conscious of the rhythms of the interchange highways, and how they are determined by clock time: 'in rush hour […] by nine o'clock the bout of fever had passed' (33). He recognizes the relentless rhythm of the traffic and the insignificance of his voice.

> His voice rose to a harsh shout above the traffic sounds, a bitter, primal scream. 'Catherine…! Catherine…!'
>
> With cold anger he shouted her name at the cars, screaming it like a child into the swerving headlamps (12).

The unbroken flow of cars form 'a familiar soundtrack of nightmare' that not only drowns his shouts for help, but also drowns the 'faint sounds' on the island that is only 'audible in the darkness' (14). Maitland's itinerary, driven by a functional purpose of survival and recuperation, both from physical injury and childhood trauma, organizes the fragmented land/soundscape of the island into new patterns set in contrast with the rhythmic drumming of the traffic. He discovers new routes, reuses materials for new purposes, and leaves marks for navigation. The island is repurposed as an archetypal space, a stage-set to rehearse a primal identity-formation. Maitland takes primitive pleasure in testing his strength and wit against an unknown space. His *flaneur* footsteps transform the 'non-place' into a cacophonous soundscape, a repository of noises that can trigger memory and unveil history. 'The rain striking the galvanized iron' triggers

his joyous memory of the past. 'Bruises and tender pressure-points covered his body like the percussion stops of an overstressed musical instrument' (18). His body turns an eolian harp in harmony with the environment. The island is mythologized as paradisal wholeness to counter his alienation and instrumentality. Torn between the centrifugal force to go back to the plane of reality and the centripedal force to descend into psychological dissolution, Maitland cannot decide whether to leave or remain on the island.

Maitland's undecidedness, as well as the island's double positionality inside/outside the motorway, has created much difficulty for reading the text. On the one hand, Andrzej Gasiorek (2005, p119) takes Maitland as a representative of the urban dwellers who are too caught up in the motorway system to be spiritually regenerated by the Edenic qualities of the traffic island. Maitland's union with the island is seen as a metaphor for the dissolution of subjectivity in a cityscape colonized and homogenized by concrete flyovers and embankments. The island is an extension of rather than exception to the motorway logic. On the other hand, critics note that Maitland's unplanned, improvisational footsteps and his primal experience in the personal garden have transformed the empty space into a real place and a palimpsest of cultural memories.

These antithetical readings also demonstrate a tension between 'non-place' and 'heterotopia'. As the 'elaborately signalled landscape' (Ballard, 1995, p50) of the motorway is often understood as an Augéan 'non-place', the concrete island has been seen as a 'heterotopia' that counters normative ordering and thus possesses a liberatory potential. As heterotopia is seen as 'other place', Ballard's fictions, which have been read both in light of Augé's idea of the 'non-place' and Michel Foucault's idea of the heterotopia, operate in a norm-other dichotomy. Christopher Duffy (2015, p2), in his spatial reading of Ballard, sees his textual spaces as 'other spaces, off-centre with respect to the normal and the everyday'. In heterotopia, one can reinvent the set of relations that govern the normal and the everyday and contaminate the homogeneity of order in centralized systems of control. Seeing heterotopia primarily as a subversive place on the periphery, Duffy (2015) also identifies Ballard as a writer of disruptive heterotopic literature who explores complex heterotopic spaces.

Reading the island as a 'non-place' and 'heterotopia' and reading Maitland's dwelling on the island as symptomatic or transcendental thus appear irreconcilable. The apparent oppositions in these two readings, I argue, are grounded on a Foucaultian or Augéan way of looking at centre and fringe, place and non-place as antithetical. A prison, for Foucault, is a heterotopia and crime, as the 'other' to normative social codes, retains a subversive potential. Ironically, while Foucault sees heterotopia as 'other space' where normative relations are reinvented, it has also given birth to the panoptic schema, a highly replicable and normative form buttressing the so-called disciplinary society and its all-encompassing authoritarian power. Heterotopia, as Kevin Hetherington (1997) contends, is not an 'other place' outside structural ordering, but features an alternative ordering in relation to that of the mainstream.

Marc Augé's notion of the 'non-place' is also shaped by its antithesis - 'heterotopia'. His place-nonplace dichotomy is structured on the binary between the homogeneous experience of capitalist productivity and the redemptive and heterotopic experience of the *flaneur*. In his definition of a place, Augé (1995, p164) borrows Baudelaire's definition of the age of modernity, where 'everything is combined, everything holds together'. In contrast, he (1995, p111) argues, in 'non-places', everything is 'unconnected' and there is no organic society. He also defines the 'non-place' against Michel de Certeau's definition of a real place, which inherits the *flaneur* tradition and recounts the primal experience of knowing oneself through encountering the other. For de Certeau (1984, cited in Augé, 1995, p77), to frequent a real place is 'to repeat the gleeful and silent experience of infancy: to be other, and go over to the other, in a place'. As a place is 'relational, historical, … concerned with identity', the 'non-place', Augé (1995, pp77-78) holds, is ahistorical, forever-present and unable to 'integrate earlier places'.

Taking the cue from Baudelaire, Benjamin (1999) in *The Arcades Projects* also sees the city of Paris as an archive of material detritus attached with cultural meaning. In the *flaneur*'s accidental footsteps, history is suddenly emergent in defamiliarized images. The city as an unfinished text or archive of piecemealed histories also resonates with neo-avant-garde notions of intermedia, co-authorship, and institutional critique of the 60s and 70s. In situationist movement and psychogeography, the city is conceived as a collaborative text, co-written by

multiple walkers as authors/readers. Ballard's work has been read along these lines (Baxter, 2009). British writer Iain Sinclair (2003) also acknowledges Ballard's resonance with contemporary psychogeography in his book *London Orbital,* a book documenting his psychic landscaping of the M25, a motorway that circles around London. Sinclair clearly has Ballard in mind when he remarks that the role of fiction is one that counters the emptiness of 'non-places' by exploring its archival effects. The power of the poet, for Sinclair, is that of a 'shaman', who re-enchants places through literary production. The city's life-force and meaning are activated by the writer as cartographer, who is 'hungry for place as expressively potent, place as experience… as a trigger to memory, imagination, and mythic presence' (Sinclair, 1991, pp246-7).

In my reading, I note how these binary relations between the instrumental reality and the experience of the *flaneur*, between de Certeau's 'place' and Augé's 'non-place' are conflated in Ballard's *Concrete Island*. Maitland is both an architect of the motorway and an avant-garde *flaneur*; his aesthetic play and idyllic union with the island is also an act of 'domination' and 'exploitation' driven by the instrumental purpose of survival. I will problematize the liberatory / formless model of the '*flaneur*' tradition, which has clearly influenced Augé's negative conception of the 'non-place' as well as the avant-garde practices. I contend that the *flaneur*'s itinerary features a different rhythm set against the mainstream. My intention is not to deny the mode of the inattentive walker altogether. What needs to be stressed is that the *flaneur* does not essentially produce a unique, redemptive, idyllic experience 'outside' the dominant capitalist practice. Ballard's text points out that as the space and history are perceived as a formless archive loosened and mobilized by the *flaneur* poet, it conceals rather than reveals the heterogeneous ways that space is used and memories are constructed. The city does not follow a coherent, hegemonic order to be subverted by the contingent and the irregular. Rather, the city is ordered into different rhythms by highly repetitive and habitual practices by different subjects.

The island, an open archive of materials, sounds, and images, is not revealing but concealing. These loose elements are modelled around Maitland's body and will. In the same way that Vaughan's car crash rehearsals co-opt broken materiality into a new rhythm,

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Maitland's union with the island is also achieved through mobilizing the island's audio, visual and material elements into a formless collage / montage. He reasserts his dominance over the island through enmeshing his body within the island that is liquidized as a mobile, open text. Taking fragmented parts from his crashed car, Maitland tries to inscribe a help message on the island:

> From the pockets of his dinner-jacket he took out the plug caps and burnt rubber leads he had wrested from the engine. Like a child at play, Maitland set out the pieces of charred rubber in two rows in front of him.
>
> […], he marked up his message.
>
> 'HELP INJURED DRIVER CALL POLICE'
>
> Leaning against the cold concrete, Maitland surveyed his handiwork (42).

In the same way that his 'primal screams' are buried in the din of the traffic, his messages also have no external referentiality. Notably, in Maitland's 'handiwork', writing becomes producing, harkening back to Benjamin's influential article 'The Author as Producer' (1998 [1934]) that took its impetus from historical avant-garde movement. Calling on artists to materially engage with the public, Benjamin champions a form of writing as material production to assist class struggle. He argues that the political commitment, what he (1998, p86) calls 'tendency', and aesthetic form, what he calls 'quality' should be consistent and one. Writing is more than proposing an abstract idea. Rather, it should be mediated on a material plane through the writer's refunctioning or 'functional transformation' (Benjamin, 1998, p93), a term he borrows from Bertolt Brecht, which means to take up pre-existing materials and use their meanings against themselves. To convey a revolutionary message and side with the proletariat, writers should call attention to their institutional positionality and subvert the power relations between writer and reader. Here, Maitland's writing is also more than an inscription of an idea, but an arranging and organizing of material objects that highlights the historical, technical, and material dimension of production. An avant-garde artist, Maitland comes out of the bourgeois plane symbolized by the motorway and proletarianizes his work by writing directly on the collective canvas of the island. Like Vaughan, the schizophrenic photographer, Maitland is both

the producer and viewer of his work. His revolutionary act breaks down and fuses the binaries of writer and reader, performer and audience, producer and consumer.

The presupposition of writer as producer is that the archive of social and material resources is open and accessible to all. Yet the use of language and materials is far from evenly distributed. In another scene, claiming to teach Proctor how to write his name and reenacting the role of the literate west cultivating the aboriginal, Maitland tricks the tramp into inscribing help messages on the embankment. While Proctor collects Maitland's car parts 'on the wooden table' and arranges them 'in a circle like ornaments on an altar' (76), Maitland reuses these materials and makes them into tools for survival: building a shelter with metal refuse, collecting drinking water from the tank, and burning the car to attract attention from passing drivers. Clasping a metal crutch and holding the collar of the dinner jacket he has clothed Proctor in, he steers 'the well-groomed domestic animal' (143) around the island. From the vantage point on Proctor's back, the motorway is visualized as entertaining spectacles – an elegant sculpture and a pleasant roof garden.

Maitland's reuse of the pipe engine, Craig Martin (2016) notes, is an example of the transformative potential of material, and his survival tactics on the island resonates with the ad hoc practices in early 1970s. Martin (2016) refers to Charles Jencks' and Nathan Silver's book *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation* (1972), which advocates a personalized, improvisational, participatory approach to the making of the environment and highlights individual empowerment and identity construction. However, as materials are stripped of their commonplace usages and functional purposes, the social and political dimensions embedded in their usage are also rendered invisible. When social space is understood as 'formless', it aids the privileged to set the parameters for new ways of inscription and distribution. As I will elaborate later in chapter two, adhocism's improvisational and user-led approach to the built environment has facilitated the paradigm shift from post-war managerial state to neoliberal capitalism.

Following Maitland's unplanned footsteps, the space turns into a palimpsestic text and an archive of memories that can be read vertically through the act of excavation. 'Almost carried by the grass, Maitland climbed on to the roof of an abandoned air-raid shelter. […] Supported by the grass blades swirling around him like a flock of eager attendants' (68-69).

Through arrhythmic and unpredictable walking practices, Maitland stumbles into strange spatial juxtapositions and intersecting temporalities:

> Parts of the island dated from well before WWII. The eastern end, below the overpass, was its oldest section, with the churchyard and the ground-course of Edwardian terraced houses. The breaker's yard and its wrecked cars had been superimposed on the still identifiable streets and alleyways. […] more and more, the island was becoming an exact model of his head. His movement across this forgotten terrain was a journey not merely through the island's past but through his own (69).

His survey of the island does not unfold its history like a static, objective palimpsest. Rather, these disparate elements are organized around and coordinated with his affective experience. Following these marks and signals, Maitland penetrates the layers of history and descends into Jane and Proctor's air-raid shelter and their underground residence. His improvised engagement with the environment follows an unconscious colonial order. Echoing Prospero's domination over Caliban and Robinson Crusoe's domestication of Friday, Maitland is nursed by Jane and Proctor. As the planned structure of the motorway is dependent on these recalcitrant and unplanned spaces of waste and 'meaningless soil' (20), Maitland also 'reuses' these two social outcasts to restore his strength and assist his plan to escape.

In his ritualistic and primal experience of the island, Maitland makes a circuit and tries to shed off sections of his body, which 'would signify the transfer of obligation from himself to the island' (71). His body also breaks into a kit of parts in exchange with the composite of the island, in a process that is reminiscent of John Locke's 'mixed-labour' theory expounded in *The Second Treatise of Government* (2017 [1689]), which has been used in Britain's colonial policy. For Locke, the land is a repository of resources given by God. Through 'mixing' their 'labour' with the land, men can remove it from the 'common state nature hath placed it in', extract it from the 'common right of other men' and turn it into private property (Locke, 2017, p11). In a similar process of annexation, Maitland dominates the island and claims it his own through mobilizing it into dividable parts that the body can work on. Mixing his body parts with the unlimited materials on the island, Maitland turns it into his property and an image of himself, in a solemn declaration: 'I am the island' (71).

While the novel resonates with the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde practices, it reveals several limitations in such avant-garde notion of rediscovering history /

remaking social space through a free, unlimited mobility of a male stroller: firstly, it is informed by an escapist dream of a 'time-out' from the instrumental flow of everyday life. The *flaneur*'s walking is a change of rhythm and an alternative way of ordering. It draws on the mythopoetic and cosmological dimension of dwelling that tends to blur structural inequalities in an essentialist view of space and humanity (Young, 2002, pp99-100). Beneath the rhetoric of destruction, disruption and emancipation lies a reconstructive desire, a reordering, rearranging, refunctioning and recasting of materials, spaces, resources to reach an affectual and psychological equilibrium with the environment.

The *flaneur* narrative also articulates an anxiety to reposition the subject into the ceaseless flux and dynamism of the world through a material process. As Martin (2016) points out, Maitland's improvised engagement with material detritus showcases the transformative potential in material things. The redemptive potential in outmoded materials resonates with the *flaneur*'s investment in material make-up of reality. Drawing on the malleability and plasticity of the material, he seeks to be sensually, affectively and materialistically plugged into the fabric of the social land/soundscape as a 'vitrified scar' or recalcitrant noise. The recuperation of the avant-garde rhetoric into commercialization constantly evokes the mythical meaning and evocative power in the material. Material is fetishized as a living being with a spectral afterlife and an inexhaustible potential to be reused and rehabilitated. Liquidizing permanent relations and fixed structures into temporary, contingent and flexible relations, connection and belonging are mediated by fragmented visual and audio forms that can be more conveniently repackaged into commodities.

Geographer Kevin Hetherington (2013, p18) has also problematized the idea of history as archive by pointing out its recuperation into 'a heritage industry and the consumerist packaging of cultural memory' in neo-liberal times. Tracing Benjamin, Aragon, Debord, Perec, de Certeau, Edensor, Sinclair, and how heritage came into prominence through UNESCO, Hetherington (2013, p17) points out that 'it is through such an archive principle that the past continues to inhabit the present within the urban setting'. In a new round of renovation, the post-war corporatist and state-led reindustrialization of the city gave way to gentrification, consumer-led redevelopment. As the city breaks into fragmented bits of materials accessible to

and in service of the resident as reader/composer, Hetherington (2013, p17) holds, it has paved the way for a consumer-led 'recataloguing' and 'repackaging' process. Transforming industrial sites into tourist attractions, its museum/heritage-led approach rebrands the city to boost economic growth, which has become a globally established new model. Hetherington (2013, p20) also points out that 'the city as heritage tells an incomplete story – one that marginalizes and excludes on such grounds of identity notably around race, class and gender'. As it presupposes city as a repository or container of materials and ruins, these ruins are easily reified in geographical sites that represent a singular cultural memory and preclude heterogeneous ways of relating to the space.

The defamiliarized visual effect in odd juxtapositions and photomontage sought after by Maitland also risks fetishizing the ruins and concealing real histories.

> Too exhausted to press on, Maitland sat on a stone wall. Around him the high nettles rose into the sunlight, their tiered and serrated leaves like the towers of Gothic cathedrals, or the porous rocks of a mineral forest on an alien planet (47).

The photographic image / vision again plays an important role in fetishizing the ruins. In Maitland's delirious state, the ruins on the island become a dialectical image, the past flashes in the present, illuminating the overlooked significance in the mundane object. The past is evoked and congeals with the present in a surrealist dreamscape. The island is magnified and recast into large time spans and extraterrestrial space far removed from here and now: 'an alien planet abandoned by its inhabitants', in front of which Maitland murmurs 'free to go' (149). Populated with surrealist images, the island is transformed into an amphitheater, which for Benjamin (1998) is another way of 'functional transformation'. In breaking the fourth wall, amphitheater interrupts traditional media and stops the audience from being lulled into a story. The avant-garde technique draws on the 'accidental' -- actively creates a moment of stoppage in existing organizations and to intercept mental flow. What for Benjamin is a useful alienation and estrangement from the Spectacle is for Maitland a state of solipsistic withdrawal. His delusion and oblivion resonate with what Hetherington (2013, p20) calls the 'amnesia in which above all a history of practice becomes reified in monumental geographical sites'.

Moving away from the fetishization/reification model, Hetherington (2013) develops Lefebre's (2013) rhythm analysis into an alternative model of reading social space as a

relational field. The city, Hetherington proposes, is noises without patterns organized into different rhythms by different subjects. Challenging the dichotomy between city as discontinuous sounding and unofficial recording on the one hand, and city as static heritage on the other, Hetherington points out that the two essentially follow the same archival principle. The look for redemptive potentials in the spectral, evocative power of forgotten traces and hidden voices, for Hetherington, is reactionary to and reliant on their relational difference to the sequential order of the official archive. To evoke the spectral past is to encounter an 'outside' found within city-as-archive and recognized against the grain of historicism. 'It is about recognizing the *punctum*, or the disruptions that ripple through an urban archive and unsettle its sense of certainty around any notion of a singular cultural memory' (Hetherington, 2013, p28) In *Concrete Island*, the materials and noises on the island are organized into a different rhythm and pattern than that of the motorway and urban centre. The less-trodden territory is a medley of waste objects and asynchronous moments. In its material and temporal disjuncture, the island allows Maitland to experience an 'outside' and to recognize a *punctum*. The *flaneur*'s encounter with the past follows the photography's remaking of the commonplace. City-as-archive is embedded within historicism, analogous to the way that the photographic still is embedded in the filmic sequence.

In other words, city as palimpsest/archive calls attention to its rhythm. Its fragments, layers and traces are not a formless whole where we encounter disparate elements at random. They have their rhythmic effects, and we have an interest-driven understanding of its patterns and forms. The novel also dramatizes the multiple and contradictory ways space can be shaped into rhythmic activities. Riding Proctor, Maitland cannot veer him towards designated routes. Maitland cannot find the escape route that Jane takes to go to work, until in the very end, he discovers 'there was no secret pathway – she walked straight up the slope, picking her way along a succession of familiar footholds, the suitcase in a strong hand'. If we attend to Jane and Proctor's rhythms that are different from Maitland's, we will notice that the island is neither an ideological construct of the Spectacle, nor an idyllic paradise for the *flaneur*'s redemption. It is a real, inhabited space Jane and Proctor are dwelling in illegally and 'informally' (McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2014). Jane, a prostitute abandoned by her husband, and Proctor, a handicapped

acrobat, dexterously and effortlessly navigates the cracks between schemes and institutions that Maitland participates in building. While the island is a structural waste comfortably tucked out of sight for the architect, it homes the dispossessed and displaced who are invisible because they do not intersect his everyday rhythms. The right to move and to occupy space is unevenly distributed through hierarchies of class and gender.

Set against the machinic Spectacle and the hegemonic work-rhythm, Maitland has dominated the island by turning it into a counter-archive of brokenness, unboundedness and unfinishedness, which necessitates the expulsion of its real residents: Jane and Proctor. At the end of the novel, Maitland acknowledges that it is no longer necessary to escape the island. He stubbornly rejects Jane's offer to help him leave and remains in the state of waiting. 'In a few hours it would be dusk. […] when he had eaten it would be time to rest, and to plan his escape from the island' (176). He has established a new rhythm on the island, into which the 'plan to escape' is also integrated. On this uncertain archival terrain, Maitland has driven away Jane and sacrificed Proctor. After Proctor is killed in an 'accident' by a road repair trunk, Maitland buries him 'in the floor of the crypt, surrounding the grave with the metal object taken from the Jaguar, and the overshoes, aerosol can and other gifts which he had made the tramp' (175). A symbol of the 'accident', Proctor is placed within the formless jumble of materials as a sacrificial token and 'honoured debt of history' (Derrida, 1994, cited in Hetherington, 2013). As Derrida points out, the archive is an unfinished text that is eternally open to the interference of the Other to disrupt and revise it (1996). As Vaughan's archive of wounds remains open and awaits a future reader, Maitland's archive of sounds preserves its openness through eradicating the real Other. Enclosed in the open-ended text in an endless play of uncertainty and disruption, he remains incalcitrant in a 'silent exodus'. Lying 'bare-chested in the warm air, the bright sunlight picking out the sticks of his ribs' (176), Maitland rests in a leisurely, immobile posture. The silent suburbia of the concrete island is the architect's eternal holiday resort. On a permanent break from the revolutionary projects of arch-modernism, of which the planned motorway landscape is a part, the neo-avant-garde flaneur is stepping into leisure society in neoliberal times.

Compared to *Crash*, *Concrete Island* delves deeper into the 'structural irony' of photography and its violent/liberatory potential by exploring the vertical dimensions of the motorway as well as the vertical dimensions of social relations. The text is also embedded within a history of island literature. In 'Desert Islands'', Deleuze (2004, pp13-14) remarks that dreaming of a deserted island is dreaming of breaking away from the continent, and of starting anew from scratch, of recreating and rebeginning. Men cannot find meaning in 'the first origin of the world', the given and the taken-for-granted. Rather, meaning can only be created through rebeginning and reproduction, which makes the inhabitant his own god, the island his own consciousness. The whole meaning of the deserted island for Deleuze is 'the survival of a sacred place' after the catastrophe destroys the original world. Deleuze further comments that when these mythologies are no longer understood by modern people, literature comes in to retell stories about reproductions on a desert island. Deleuze criticizes *Robinson Crusoe* for not having invented anything new. Robinson's activities on the island are not a mythological recreation of life, but a replication of bourgeois life and the accumulation of capital. Neither is there an alternative temporality outside the dominant clock time regulated for capitalist productivity. For Deleuze, the island as a heterotopia embodies the potential for new beginnings. Ballard evokes the island narrative, a notable literary trope to imagine 'a new beginning'. Dysfunctional elevators, subway tunnels in power failure and motorway underpasses, for Ballard (2011), are modern islands.

Reappropriating the age-old trope of a survival story with allusions to *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*, Ballard also builds a dialogue with these intertexts and use the historical conventions around island narratives as the technical supports for his text. Ballard's self-conscious evocation of desert island literature in dramatizing a modern technological space also opens his text to multiple readings and meanings that call for the readers' participation. *Concrete Island* has acquired new meanings from involving readership. It continues to inspire readers and researchers, some of which creatively inhabit real traffic islands and see them in a new light (Longfellow, 2021). In the special issue (2016) on *Concrete Island* in *Literary Geographies* containing contributions from cultural geographers, design historians and literary scholars, the text is considered as a source of inspiration to for contemporary debates on

architecture, landscape and cultural practice. As the editors Alexander Beaumont and Daryl Martin state (2016, p2), the prominent text provides 'an anamorphic portrait that complicates and strains contemporaneous narratives of English modernity, consumer culture and technological progress'. The text is a distorted image that begs continuous readings.

3. From 'Non-Place' to 'Autopoetics'

We have always been on the move. Modernization in a way parallels the revolution of mobile technology to improve the efficiency of movement. Ballard's texts can be aligned with a set of geographical and anthropological discourse about (auto)mobility in many ways. They can be situated in the 1970s when customized cars in differentiated forms infiltrated different lifestyles, social status, needs of drivers from different enclaves. The utopian notion and cultural aspiration of progress, prosperity, modernization, freedom, independence, and the capacity to transcend the constraints of time and space fed into the unstoppable momentum with which cars colonized urban life. Meanwhile, there was a backlash against car-use due to environmental concerns, road casualties, and the drabness of motorized cityscapes. Traffic jams and air pollution were plaguing city streets and became the malady of the times. Reflections on the malaise of modernity were accompanied by an anti-car, anti-industrial, anti-speed and anti-machine sentiment. During the last century, the car was studied as a technical object, the production and use of which were associated with progress or destruction.

Ballard's texts not only respond to the debate around automobility in the seventies but also anticipate a changing perspective in geography, sociology and anthropology on the motorway landscape at the turn of the century.

Associating mobile technology solely with a utilitarian obsession with economic productivity or spiritual degeneration is predicated on a problematic dichotomy between nature and culture, the human and the machine. In postmodernist and posthuman contexts that tend to fuse antagonistic concepts and abolish dichotomous thinking, mobility emerges as a new subject of study and its various aspects have come to be considered in a neutral light. The mobility turn (Hannam et al, 2006) and the dawning of the 'New Mobilities Paradigm' (Sheller and Urry, 2006) have testified how the ability and need to move are essential aspects of what it means to be human. Mobility is ubiquitous, and its impacts are far- reaching. It is interwoven with our daily practices. It concerns how we go to work, study, travel, take walks after dinner, how we define ourselves, and how we relate to each other. It shapes our physical environments and social-economic structures. After all, to look into how mobility is fundamentally transforming our lives and how to best manage its impacts would benefit from a calm, non-judgmental attitude and sincere curiosity. The increasing novelty, hybridity and interdisciplinarity of mobilities research cannot do without that realization.

Tim Cresswell (2006) wraps up the central concerns in mobilities research, a subject of remarkable complexity and significance, in a question of powerful simplicity: what makes getting from A to B interesting? According to him, three key elements of mobilities are movement, meaning and power, which can be unpacked into the following questions: what happens when we move from place A to B? What is the quality, character, and empirical content of the movement? What meaning is generated through various modes of movement? What power relations are at play and how are subjects shaped by them? How is the right to move unevenly distributed through the hierarchy of class, race, ethnicity, and gender? This line of enquiry also transforms the functional line of the motorway into the dramatic stage of the political.

At the turn of the century, more works in mobilities research on the far-reaching impacts of the car emerged, and further challenged the taken-for-granted dichotomy of car/body, car/environment. Nigel Thrift (2004) looked at the car as a hybrid entity and an

assemblage where man and technological systems interacted. Daniel Miller (2020) criticized previous literature for lacking empathetic observation and making rushed, sweeping and unwarranted claims about the relationship between the car and the human. Numerous scholars (Miller, 2020; Wollen and Kerr, 2002; Brandon, 2002; Featherstone et al, 2005; Vanderbilt, 2009) contributed to delineating a complex network of car culture, in which the car existed less as an autonomous machine working on humanity than something integral to, embedded within and inseparable from its human and social context.

A similar trajectory of academic endeavor is traceable in the study of road systems. Peter Merriman (2007) criticized Augé's theory for overlooking the discontinuous nature of the motorway: the specificity and historicity of the motorway space and the way that it is used by different people in different ways with different experiences. For Merriman, the ready association of the motorway with alienation, emptiness and detachment does not help us investigate the complex, subtle and heterogeneous ways they were inhabited by various social groups. Through researching the history of the M1 motorway in Britain, he proposes a new way of looking at the road other than dismissing it as placeless and intrusive. Augé, Merriman argues, has overemphasized the opposition between the non-place and the place. The motorway contains too diversified a range of forms and structures, rhythms, and temporalities to be regarded as an all-encompassing superstructure, or symbol of a hegemonic ideology.

Along the same lines, instead of characterizing the experience of driving as determinedly boring, impoverished, and involving a pacified body passing through a featureless space, critics started to note its productive and affective dimensions. The car was conceived as 'the prosthetic of the human mind' (Pearce, 2016, p1) capable of generating visually and cognitively rich contents. Driving evoked aesthetic, emotional and sensory responses from car-users, and was intertwined with new sensations, sensibilities, and cultural meanings. While the driver's experience used to be taken as one that is marked by sensorial sterility and boredom (Relph, 1976; Sennett, 1994; Augé, 1995), later geographical studies have reconfigured the motorway as a concrete place enabling rich and heterogeneous aesthetic and kinaesthetic experiences by subjects of various gender, class and races (Cresswell, 2006; Merriman, 2007; Pearce, 2016).

These new approaches, negotiating microscopic analysis of the car-user's embodied experiences and psychological dispositions on one hand, and macroscopic examination of the collective cultural patterns surrounding the car on the other, have foregrounded the relationality of human, cars and urban landscapes. Daniel Miller in *Car Cultures* (2020) views the human relationship to cars as too contradictory and convoluted to be pinned down simplistically as alienation. He (2001, p2) claims his book 'seeks to reveal and consider the evident humanity of the car'. Departing from an elitist, anti-car and anti-urban sentiment, they adopt a nonjudgmental attitude towards the expressive potential in technology.

What these scholars jointly illuminate, I believe, are three things: first, the motorway is not simply a hegemonic system with an all-encompassing ordering and unimpeded mobility. Rather, it is discontinuous and fragile, constructed and experienced by multiple and heterogeneous objects. Second, the 'non-place' model hardly addresses the reason why we are attached to and willingly trapped within these supposedly repressive structures. Mobilities research has helpfully acknowledged that these infrastructures are simultaneously dramatic stages where we experience the freedom and contingency of performance, where we engage in an intimate play and interaction with forms. Third, an illumination of the political unconsciousness around the motorway requires a closer examination of its heterogeneous set of forms, how power operates through them and what political changes can be made, which counters the apolitical and ahistorical nature of the 'non-place'.

Contextualized in these debates, Ballard's texts about car crashes debunk the notion of the 'non-place' and illuminate the geopolitical unconscious in the motorway. The motorway does not impose a preordained order/discipline on the individual; rather, it is an infrastructural system where people are connected through tactility in dynamic modulation. It is also a theatrical stage where visibility participates political action and identity formation. Like the grid, it enables a way of ordering, relating, and arranging. It brings people, place and objects into relations and unity. The theoretical field of the motorway is not simply restrictive. As the one-to-one fixed relation between people and people, people and place where Augé would like to locate meaning has become arbitrary and temporary, meaning is no longer permanent and

integral to a place, in the same way that the signifier has lost its inherent referentiality.

Far from a seamless realm of uninterrupted mobility in spectacular media images, the motorway is a discontinuous realm replete with moments of stillness and stoppage. It is also in these moments that the motorway reveals its utopian potentials. As objects, spaces and materials are made more accessible as they are 'pried out of shells' and transferred to a mobile plane, individuals shed off their specific backgrounds and become anonymous drivers and displaced tenants plugged in a new field of action. Correcting the way that stillness is often 'discursively othered' (Bissel and Fuller, 2011, p5) and assigned an antagonistic relation with movement, mobility scholars have also made the case that 'mobilities and moorings' are related phenomena (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006). Fast movements are sustained by still infrastructure. Slowness, friction, and blockages, both interfere with movement and make it possible. Mobility is enabled by immobility; stasis is integral to dynamism. It is often when infrastructures break down that they become visible and make room for important interrogations. These moments provide a vantage point to scrutinize the way the urban life is organized, and often bring political issues to the fore (Graham and Marvin, 2001).

The new outlook of the motorway is also nested within a new conceptualization of place as lived, embodied, contingent and textual, which Ballard's texts contribute to. Besides practical purposes of making a linear linkage from point A to B, transport corridors, Merriman (2007) argues, have aesthetic purposes and could be viewed and experienced as 'unique novelistic chronotope'. John Urry (2004, p27) also describes automobility as firstly and fundamentally a system, a 'self-organizing autopoetic'. The signifying dimension of the mobile system is explored in urban scholar Ole B. Jensen's study (2013) of 'mobile semiotics'. The concept of 'geosemiotics'', i.e. 'the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs and discourses and of our actions in the material world' (Scollon and Scollon, 2003, p2), has been incorporated into social geography and mobilities research. Rather than dismissing the motorway or the car as a restrictive form with a predetermined order and

unified meaning, these geographers lay bare its infrastructural basis and fictitious nature and negotiate the meaning of a place as contingent and diverse.

Compared to the non-place/heterotopia model, the autopoetic model not only emphasizes the political nature of the infrastructural system but also foregrounds the agentive potentials and possibilities in highlighting alternative modes of mobilities that are overshadowed by dominant rhythms. The difference between an Augéan and Foucauldian conception of culture and novelist chronotope / autopoetic is that the former appears merely restrictive and prescriptive, and latter allows for freedom of reordering and spontaneity, the former view language as functional and monologic, the latter sees it as aesthetic and multi-voiced, the former is centrally organized in a top-town fashion, the latter is collectively constructed and invested with people's affections and desires. As the former announces the loss of agency or death of politics, as the public space that enables political action is dismantled in the economic use of space, the latter points to the heterogeneous and disjunct nature of its form and the possibility of political action. As the mental image of an onerous machinery starts to collapse, the possibility of action and agency reemerges. As Larkin argues, the linguistic system of infrastructure has multiple users as speakers/addressees. They experience minor rhythms, alternative spatial relations, different modes of constructing identities and memories.

Ballard's texts contribute to the shift from the non-place/heterotopia to relationality/network conceptualization of the urban space. The non-place / heterotopia view of urban space is centred around the bourgeoisie experience of urban space as either structured or formless. The autopoetic model displaces the dichotomy between non-place and heterotopia with a relational concept of space where mobility and stoppage are intertwined; walking and driving feature different ways of organizing disparate elements into rhythms and patterns. The revolutionary potential of the walker lies in the way it disrupts the dominant rhythm and mobilizes the urban space as an archive capable of generating new patterns. Rather than channeling the shock-effect to a therapeutic release for a male stroller and facilitating the reification of ruins in heritage industry and consumer culture, it is also important to note that the meaningful ways that social minorities make communities through 'informal' dwelling (Mcfarlane and Vasudevan, 2014). Infrastructure can enact 'planned

violence' (Boehmer and Davies, 2018) towards the deprivileged. The urban space as a formless archive can also enact 'unplanned violence' – it not only renders the structure of social classes and gender hierarchy invisible and prevents local residents from making communities.

Chapter Two - Suburbia and Architecture in *High-Rise and 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista'*

The last book of Ballard's urban trilogy, *High-Rise* (2006 [1975]) follows a 40-storey residential building located in a newly developed area of suburban London and hosting around 2000 affluent residents slowly descending into chaos and violence. The dystopian nightmare of the novel points at the failure of several modernist architectural projects. Most apparently it satirizes British government's construction of council estate buildings and relocation of poor populace to outskirts of town to solve the problem of urban density. Due to material deterioration, insufficient funding and corruption, these buildings gradually fell apart. The affluent middle-class professionals being housed in the apartment block as one of the five identical units in the development project has also anticipated the privatization of public housing blocks under Thatcher's neoliberal policy. *High-Rise* has been read as a literary documentation or a reiteration of the disillusion with modernist architecture or critique of leisure society at the time (Gasiorek, 2005). I will read the construction and destruction of *High-Rise* as dramatizations of two recuperation processes of the avant-garde in capitalism. Seen in this framework of avant-garde and capitalism, 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista' (1962), the last story collected in *Vermilion Sands* (2001[1971]), anticipates a third recuperation process in architecture's cybernetic turn. Combining a cyclic view of history that traces the life/death of modernism and identifying an interval of hope, and drawing on contemporary thing theory and new materialism, I also uncover a hidden anthropological vein and a psychological mechanism in modernism's progressive politics which finds expression in everyday home-making experiences.

1. Two Recuperations of the Avant-Garde in Capitalism

'The ideology of planning'

High-Rise dramatizes two historical moments of avant-garde recuperation by an adaptable capitalism, which Evan Mauro summarizes as such:

> First, the historical avant-garde set itself against bourgeois liberalism, whose expanding industrial organization was at odds with its residually classicist culture, and provided the aesthetic and ideological critique necessary for an ascendant managerialism. Second, in the 60s, the avant-garde was again appealed to, this time as a discourse of liberation

from the hegemonic state forms of managerialism that were derived, ironically, from the historical avant-garde itself (2012, p129).

Adopting a disenchanted approach to the history of architecture since enlightenment, Italian architect theorist Manfredo Tafuri (1976) in his book *Architecture and Utopia Design and Capitalist Development* traces the history of architecture alongside the development of capitalism and sees the city as a locus where the crisis plays itself out and reorganizes its chaotic aftermaths into a new order. For Tafuri, the historical avant-garde's negative critique of liberal capitalism has paved way for the midcentury managerial revolution, including 'fascist corporatism, the Soviet five-year plan, the Keynesian economic dirigisme' (Mauro, 2013, p127). Dada and futurism's challenge of cultural apparatus 'produced new avenues for integrating culture and industry and a whole new conception of culture as work, cast in the image of the designer' (Mauro, 2013, p127). What Tafuri (1995, cited in Mauro, 2013, p127) calls 'the ideology of planning' has become the 'password' for both socialism and capitalism. In the principle of 'function define form', aesthetics and utility, egalitarianism and totalitarianism, culture and industry, creativity and work are united in the image of a mastermind designer. The avant-garde notions of 'city as machine', while expressing socialist aspirations, are conveniently recuperated in the post-war planned economy. Planning has also facilitated more efficient and larger-scaled circulation of capital.

The first recuperation process is dramatized in the building's construction in the novel. Standing on his balcony overlooking the suburban site, one of the main characters, Laing, observes that:

> The immense volume of open space that separated the building from the neighboring high-rise a quarter of a mile away unsettled his sense of balance. At times he felt that he was living in the gondola of a ferris wheel permanently suspended three hundred feet above the ground [...] The massive scale of the glass and concrete architecture, and its striking situation on a bend of the river, sharply separated the development project from the rundown areas around it, decaying nineteenth-century terraced houses and empty factories already zoned for reclamation (8).

Constructed on a newly developed site in suburban London, the building repeats the historical avant-garde's nomadic posture of radical departure and flight. It hosts an affluence class on self-exile away from urban centres. Its 'impressive range of services' (9), facilities and activities make it unnecessary to leave the building altogether. Like the motorway, the high-rise is

another grid form that the avant-gardes escape into. As the car crash jolts the motorway sequence into disorder, the high-rise also gives a sense of radical dislocation. The disjunct temporalities, which are layered vertically in an archaeological mix in *Concrete Island*, here are horizontally laid out and can be distinctly recognized. The immense open archive of disparate elements disturbs and subverts everyday work rhythms in the city centre. Living in the high-rise, Laing feels he has 'travelled forward fifty years in time, away from crowded streets, traffic hold- ups, rush-hour journeys on the underground' (9). Futurism's revolutionary energy is complicit in an urban sprawl. The temporal and geographical dislocation offers an experience of futurity, freedom and transcendence.

The white-haired mastermind architect, Anthony Royal, residing on the top floor, bears remarkable resemblance to Swiss architect Le Corbusier, the key artist of The International Style and design modernism that emerged from Europe after the first world war. The 'small vertical city' (9) is an explicit reference to Le Corbusier's notion of the vertical garden city. The high-rise also mirrors his use of unembellished industrial materials – the glass, concrete and steel and his use of grid form to ensure maximum freedom in designing facades and floor plans. The design combines functionality with aesthetics. The interior is divided into distinctive functional areas – 'its studio living-room and single bedroom, kitchen and bathroom dovetailed into each other to minimize space and eliminate internal corridors' (9). It is centrally organized and managed, with regular appliance renewal, standardized services provision, homogeneous goods distribution and replenishment. The 'over-priced cell' is 'built for men's absence' (10). Among other bourgeois professionals, Laing, moves into the building for its anonymity and 'cool, unemotional appeal' (15). The minimalist design combines the economic use of space with a clear-headed aesthetic appeal, which fosters a new bourgeois lifestyle of alienation and emotional estrangement: 'living in high-rises required a special type of behavior, one that was acquiescent, restrained, even perhaps slightly mad' (52).

The residents moving into the building gives Royal 'a renewed physical authority' as he retreats into a wheelchair after a car accident. 'By contrast with the calm and unencumbered geometry of the concert hall and television studios below him, the ragged skyline of the city resembled the disturbed encephalograph of an unresolved mental crisis'. The construction of the building parallels with the recuperation of Royal's physical strength and mental will and the establishment of his authority. 'Without knowing it, [Royal] had constructed a gigantic vertical zoo, its hundreds of cages stacked above each other' (134). Royal, a modernist architect and a dictator, is a post-war recuperation of historical avant-garde's institutional critique. Dada and futurism's 'mental crisis' is resolved by a production-friendly type of design aesthetic with an inherent strain of totalitarianism.

Clearing away the hierarchy in the classist structure and designed for egalitarian use, the building still replicates a planned hierarchical structure. The residents are divided into 'three classical social groups, its lower, middle and upper classes': the 'proletariat' film technicians and airhostesses in the lower nine floors, the middle class of doctors and lawyers from 10th to 35th floor, and the 'discreet oligarchy of minor tycoons and entrepreneurs' (52) on the top five floors. The three protagonists, Wilder (TV executor), Laing (medical doctor) and Royal (architect) also represent these three groups. The novel that alternates among their narrations also has a triad structure. Flickering away the vestige of aristocracy in the heavily ornamented classic architecture, the high-rise expresses equality and freedom in its gritty structure and transparent spaces. The visibility, however, calls to mind Bentham's panopticon, which is also a utopian project in the outskirt that marries authoritarian planning with utilitarian calculation. In the same way that the spatial design of the panopticon allows power to transfer from the surveilling eye to the infrastructure itself in a diffused manner, the high-rise also grows into a huge organism with an agency of itself.

The novel's complex allusion to Le Corbusier reveals the oppositional but intertwined tendencies and impulses in modernism which are played out in various utopian and dystopian projects. In *The Guardian* article, 'A Handful of Dust', Ballard sees totalitarian regimes of fascism and communism as modernism's utopian project turned dystopian:

> In its heyday between the wars, modernism was a vast utopian project, and perhaps the last utopian project we will ever see, now that we are well aware that all utopias have their dark side. Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia were two utopian projects that turned into the greatest dystopias the world has known. […] Hitler and Stalin were intrigued by modernism, which seemed part of a new world of aviation, radio, public health and mass consciousness. But the dictators were nervous of clear-headed people who thought for themselves (2023 [2006], p147).

As the dictators are half attracted to and half 'fearful' of the mass consciousness of the avant-gardes, Royal is also both 'intrigued by life in this vertical township' (72) and takes the formation of different clans and vandalism as 'a personal attack on himself' (100), both intrigued and intimidated by the building, both welcoming and resentful of the mass will in the outbreaks of violence, the 'unspoken agreement among the residents of the high-rise' (126). Suppressed by totalitarian regimes, many architects of Bauhaus and The International Style resettled in the U.S. and participated in the post-WWII skyscraper construction. Le Corbusier's pragmatism was evoked in brutalism that emerged after World War Two and assisted the reconstruction of cities with mass housing schemes. The double strands of freedom and control in modernism continued to play out in the capitalist development.

The ideology of unplanning

As the building's construction dramatizes the mid-century recuperation of historical avant-gardes, the building's destruction dramatizes the neo-avant-garde's recuperation into leisure society and neoliberalism in the 70s. The ideal of progressive modernism in architecture is increasingly disrupted and criticized for causing environmental crisis, social inequality and reducing the inhabitant's needs to functionalism. The demolishing of Pruitt-Igoe estate in Saint Louis in 1972 has announced the bankruptcy of the social idealism in post-war mass social housing scheme. The strand of authoritarianism in Le Corbusier's idea is critiqued, and the strand of aesthetic creativity forms the basis of the neo-avant-garde movement. Architecture is conceived less as a prison 'cell' but a human 'cell', less as a functionalist, protective shell for eating and sleeping, but a prosthetic extension of the self.

One of the members of the Independent Group, architectural critic Reyner Banham, popularized the term 'new brutalism' in his 1955 essay, which refers to the post-war architectural style particularly associated with Peter and Alison Smithson. For Banham (2012), new brutalism is more honest and human than the earlier modernist architecture. In Archigram, an avant-garde British architectural group active from the 60s to mid-70s, architecture is designed to be modular, transient, a living organism that is 'pulsating'. The projects of 'living city' (1963) 'the walking city' the 'the instant city' suggest a nomadic, mobile way of life, and 'plug-in city' envisions the city as a mega machine with a cubist structure and exchangeable, collapsible parts, which revisits Le Corbusier's 'human as single cell' and 'city as a machine'. Building on and modifying Le Corbusier's approach to architecture, the neo-avant-gardes adopt a more flexible, personalized approach to the built environment. Moving beyond an authoritarian role, the proponents of Archigram aspire to be mere organizers and curators in repeated cycles of production. Their prankish ethos resonates with the Situationist International, who draw on the idea of play in Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1934) and Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Everyday Life* (1947) and develop leisure and play into an ideological tool to critique capitalist productivity. The mobility of Archigram and Situationists counters the collective and homogenous rhythm of capitalist productivity and resists the reification of consumer culture.

Rebelling against the high-rise as a stable, concrete construct and an idealistic blueprint, the inhabitants treat the building as a habitation cell and a soft organism. The high-rise is both a functional, authoritarian modernist architecture and Archigram's mobile, democratic and collapsible 'instant city'. As the social order disintegrates, the residents engage in creative and unconventional use of space and repeat the boisterous and subversive scenarios of *Crash* and *Concrete Island*. Their rebellion against the 'uniform structural organization' alludes to the counterculture movement's institutional critique. The revolt is a knowing agreement amongst themselves in a self-enclosed 'heterotopia' ruled by tribal anarchy.

The utopian construction and dystopian destruction of the building are twinned expressions of the same impulse. The building, as the narrator Laing observes, is built for its own destruction. Its construction is already a covert expression of a mischievous, playful, boisterous energy. Laing, dwelling in the middle section of the building, realizes that the building is 'designed for war, on the unconscious level' (23) and a 'drama of confrontation between the concrete slabs and the rising sun' (19). The first unsettling incident in the novel is a bottle of sparkling wine falling from the higher floor onto Laing's balcony during one of the parties: 'The agitated wine seethe[s] across the cracked tiles' (7), expressing the agitation of a psychic energy that seeks to crack the tiled and gritty spaces in the building. Echoing the broken bottle, a broken mirror occurs much later in the novel, which 'flicker[s] like the fragments of another world trying unsuccessfully to reconstitute itself' (110). 'Trivial disputes over the faulty elevators and air-conditioning, inexplicable electrical failures, noise, competition for parking space' (18). 'The sounds of deliberately over-animated chatter, the aggressive blare of a record-player' (8) travel across the hard concrete of walls and balconies.

The 'play of light' (19) over the surface of the glass facades alters the size of the blocks. The avant-garde project of the high-rise has a Freudian structure. While its conscious expression is a progressive, revitalizing and reconstitutive project, its unconscious need is for play, war, and confrontation. These 'conscious and unconscious expressions' in the novel only appear to be oppositional but are essentially the same. The freedom and comfort offered by the high-rise is grounded in a radical act of purging: the clearing away of normative relations, categories and borders. As the crash is an immanent mode of automobility, the built-in instincts for destruction are expressed, schizophrenically, by the tenants in their 'unconscious' revolt. The imposition of form and its disintegration enter a dialectical cycle and are utopian and dystopian expressions of the same impulse.

Wilder, a 'thick-set, pugnacious' (14) TV producer living on the second floor, is a figure of bestiality. His hostility against Royal seems to signify a tension between animal instinct and cerebral energy. Royal and Wilder's confrontation resemble the opposite trends in avant-garde's devotion to and distance from productivity. Like a Situationist armed with the Marxist theory of class struggle, Wilder cannot bear the weight of the building and decides to climb up and confront Royal. Meanwhile a pop artist and a psychogeographer, he carries camera equipment to investigate the psychology of high-rise living. He gradually forgets his mission and reverts to a wandering child in an unending game of spatial navigation, in the same way that Archigram's 'flux and fun' deviates from the seriousness and combativeness of Marxist critique. When he finally reaches Royal's room on the 40th floor, he mistakes it for 'a house he visited as a small child' (165). His murder of Royal is framed as a 'game'. Thinking the architect is only 'pretending to be dead', he is 'confused by this game, and its unexpected turns' (166). After killing Royal, he is lost in a sculpture garden: 'Wilder could see the geometric forms of the play-sculptures, their vivid colours standing out against the white walls' (166-7). His fascination with

the play-sculpture calls to mind Maitland's fetishization of the dialectical images on the concrete island. In his eyes, the tribe of women making fire with old furniture and forming a circle around him 'seemed to belong to another century and another landscape' (167). In ritualistic rapture, he is mutilated and eaten by the mothers, making a literal return to the womb. Wilder's vanguardism amounts to a false consciousness and a formal play that is out of control. The revolutionary rigor is subsumed in psychological regression and ecstatic utopian illusionism.

The two seemingly antagonistic and oppositional forces of construction and destruction are united as two parts of the same process. In the ending of the novel, which eerily repeats the beginning, the high-rise plunges into complete darkness, a new building pops out 'four hundred yards away. A temporary power failure had occurred' (173). The high-rise experiences periodical reconstruction in the investment cycle of capital. The personalized approach to space has facilitated the rise of a user-centred, whim-driven consumer culture. Repeating and continuing the historical avant-garde's breaking free from aristocratic structures before flowing into cultural industry and design modernism, the neo-avant-garde's derivation and departure from design modernism again facilitates the transition from the planned economy of the Keynesian state to neoliberal market economy. In an endless cycle of construction and destruction, the ideology of planning and unplanning are twinned expressions of the avant-garde recuperated into capitalist production.

Let us return to Tafuri's thesis. Writing in the 1970s when avant-garde architecture was still seeking its cultural and political role in transforming the world, Tafuri proclaims a pessimistic 'death of architecture' after the fall of socialist ideals and modern art's defeat by the capital. Disillusioned with modernism's utopia, he rejects the notion of architectural criticism and identifies two opposite trends in the twentieth century avant-garde movements: 'one which affirmed the validity of intellectual work within the reality of industrialism, the other negating this role and claiming an autonomy of "pure ideology"' (Haddad, 2003, p307). For Tafuri (cited in Haddad, 2003, p308), the former is inevitably assimilated into the capitalist system, and the latter's insistence on ideological autonomy is a false consciousness,

'pathological attempts of a bourgeoisie in anguish' catalogued in 'the imaginary museum of the bad conscience of our small age' that offer no real way out.

Ballard in his post-millennium hindsight also sees the modernist architecture as a continuation, rather than rupture from the enlightenment ideal. 'Function defined form, expressed in a pure geometry that the eye could easily grasp in its entirety'. In the clairvoyance one masters space in an instant and totalizing manner. The brutalist architecture, for Ballard, is heroic because unabashed in imagining a future of clear geometry and formal simplicity. Classicism's 'ornamentation concealed rather than embellished'. The aesthetic excess of classism, the ornamentation and embellishment of gothic and baroque tradition is a 'defensive fantasy […] a set of conjuring tricks to ward off the age of reason' (2023[2006], p146). In Ballard's configuration, classism and modernism share the same hierarchical structure, except that the latter has cleared away the aesthetic garments and defensive fantasies. Modernism does not remove hierarchy but clears the ground for capitalism's move towards flexible customization and quicker investment cycles. Tafuri's point about the recuperation of avant-garde's embrace and criticism of industrialization in an all-voracious capitalist system, seems particularly fitting for interpreting *High-Rise*'s cyclic narrative and repetitive tone and reflects a general disillusionment with modernism in the 70s.

2. Two Readings of 'Form Without Utopia'

Even in Tafuri's pessimistic thesis, there is a prophetic call for a new future of 'form without utopia' (Puglisi, 2013, p132). He proposes that architecture should abandon the attempt to change the world and to return to pure, empty architecture and sublime uselessness. Architects should be nobody. What can be retrieved from the failure of modernism, for Tafuri, is a reconceptualization of form that celebrates its emptiness, before it is reabsorbed into grand ideation. Luigi Puglisi (2013) in his review of Tafuri's *Architecture and Utopia* sees 'form without utopia' as both a reactionary refuge to a periodically reviving formalism and a precursor of postmodernism. Tafuri's book, For Puglisi (2013, p132) writes, demonstrates a double defeat: 'Those who believe in utopia are defeated by the cunning of capital, which renders vain any idea of revolution, absorbing the criticisms and negativity of the avant-garde. Those who are

disillusioned are forced into a poetic that perennially contemplates its existence as void form, empty of any Utopian strength- in short, an aesthetic that celebrates its own failure'. For Puglisi, the disillusion at technologically progressive projects in the 70s is 'forced' into a self-referential, self-reflective poetics that anticipates postmodernism's uncertainty and ambiguity as a caution against structure and unity. It also signals a reactionary formalism – as politically engaged art/ art's participation in politics leads to totalitarianism and destruction, formalism is reluctant to announce great revolution and powerlessness in engaging social reality.

Tafuri's idea of city as a locus where crises play out is clearly influenced by Marx's dialectical materialism. His 'death of architecture' also echoes Bürger's 'death of the avant-garde'. Thinking along those lines, Tafuri's antidote to the recuperation process, proposed in 'form without utopia' can hardly escape a flexibly adaptive capitalist system. One could argue 'form without utopia' is only open to a humble, benign version of postmodernism, which eventually shows another face in its cold-eyed pastiches and nonchalant assimilation into commercialization. One could also argue that the proliferation of 'non-places' proclaimed by Augé is in a way also a dialectical realization of what Tafuri celebrates as 'architect-as-nobody'. The infrastructural places in Ballard's novels, overlooked yet everywhere, are various 'forms without utopia'. Formalism or postmodernism, 'form without utopia' can hardly escape the fate of recuperation.

Is all hope lost in these endless cycles of recuperation and repeated proclamations of deaths? Challenging Tafuri's 'lack of interest' in the aesthetic effects of architectural objects and criticizing his 'disengagement' with contemporary architecture, Ignasi de Sola-Morales (2000, p2) contends that Tafuri's critique, due to its radically anti-capitalist stance indebted to the Frankfurt School, has reductively synthesized heterogeneous architectural practices into a 'critical history', which is different from the history of architecture. As Puglisi (2013, p132) points out, influenced by communist Massimo Cacciari's (1973) notion of metropolis, Tafuri sees the city as 'a (non)place structure by capital to absorb its contradictions'. The pervasive power of the capital and its modelling of nonplaces on the global scale also informs the thinking of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Empire* (2000). From Sola-Morales and Puglisi's reviews, we may gather that Tafuri's Marxist critique is grounded on a reductive logic: it both reduces

the city to a homogeneous nonplace structure and reduces architecture to a unified political expression.

Although a reading of *High-Rise* built on Tafuri's insight is useful in laying bare the underlying unity in the opposing impulses of the avant-gardes and the persistence of capitalism, it could, as Sola-Morales suggests, overlook architecture's non-ideological facet as an object and a lived practice. In light of Sola-Morales's criticism, Tafuri might have too readily dismissed Archigram for its utopian ambitions and overlooked the way that it embodies a post-utopian notion of architecture as a lived, contingent practice. Despite its ambition, most projects of Archigram are speculative, prank-like, 'useless' ideas on paper rather than hard built facts. Due to its fantastical nature, it has been marginalized in architectural theory/history that prioritized 'real' buildings. Simon Sadler (2005, p4) argues for Archigram's theoretical as well as historical significance: 'its liquidating the philosophical foundations of architecture' and anticipation of postmodern anxiety to rethink what architecture is. For Sadler (2005), Archigram's passion for the future makes it the last fling of modernism. As a neo-avant-garde movement, the 'neo' suggests an ideological distance from historical avant-gardes. Although Archigram's design pays homage to futurism, constructivism, and reiterates many themes of historical avant-gardes, it replaces their combative, confrontational leftist stance with the flux and fun of materials. Adopting indeterminacy and whimsy as a design paradigm, Archigram is mischievous and boisterous. A 'mobile outsider' (Sadler, 2005, p6) to Architecture, it seeks to pull architecture from idea / criticism / harbinger of new world back into the vicissitudes and materiality of life. The alignment of *High-Rise* with Archigram's aesthetics thus can be seen in a different light than an unconscious clearing of the ground, or a schizophrenic counterpart to the constructive, productive strand of modernism. In the novel, the revolt of the residents is self-defeating. The carnival of broken forms, unfettered creativity and tribal anarchy serve no socialist purpose. The burgeoning postmodern sentiment in Archigram's speculative projects and Ballard's speculative fiction pivots from the ideological towards the virtual and the speculative. As architect Nigel Coates (2010) argues, Ballard's texts that operate in an ambiguous space between the practical and the theoretical have inspired architects to make simulations and speculations about what is possible other than what is actual. Coates's argument resonates

with Sadler's championing of Archigram for its theoretical and speculative bent and its liquidizing of the practice-based tradition of architecture.

As Tafuri's critique is somehow trapped in an anti-capitalist ideological construct, I proffer an alternative reading of 'form without utopia' outside the utopia/dystopia, Capitalism/Marxism dichotomy. In between the seemingly hopeless cycle of recuperation in an endlessly expanding capitalist structure, there was still a genuine interest in the future demonstrated in a backward-looking posture. Despite its circular narrative, *High-Rise* still looks at the future by looking at the past, the residents are devising a new model of the future through traversing the catastrophic site and foraging the modernist ruins. In the disillusioned moment after the 'death of utopia' or 'death of architecture', the decadence and boisterous fun in *High-Rise*, as well as in Archigram, does not simply mean pessimist reaction to or defeatist acceptance of a dead dream. Rather, it is also about rebuilding and reconstructing home using materials at hand. Interestingly, Archigram's interval of hope in between cycles of recuperation also draws on an undercurrent of mobile forms, yet it is different from an empty, socially disengaging formalism. *High-Rise* can be read both as a testament to the cyclic failures of modernism, and a witness to an investment, reactionary or not, in an alternative way of world building that relies less on grand ideas than the diversity, tangibility and mobility of forms that are available at hand. It is a moment when we reconceptualize and reappropriate materials outside their technological history and cultural function.

In the 2010 conference *Ballardian Architecture: Inner and Outer Space*, literary critics and architects explore the connections between Ballard's work, *High-Rise* being a core text, and the future of architecture. Ballard is associated with the Independent Group of *This is Tomorrow* Exhibition in Whitechapel Gallery in 1965 that kick-started the British new avant-garde movement and pop art. Joanne Murray (2010) notes a shared fascination between Ballard and Banham with peripheral spaces and an 'as-found' aesthetics, i.e. an engagement with the modern urban landscape as it actually is. Banham and Ballard's work together with pop art make up a 'post-technological, post-academic, even post-architectural discourse' (Vidler, 2000, cited in Murray, 2010, p479). Both writers approach the motorway as an exhibition space to display and examine the clash of forms and unexpected happenings. Both

try to reclaim and reformulate materials in a way that makes sense to the individual and emphasize the nonconformity of dweller and the reciprocity between artist and viewer. Others (Cunningham, 2010) note that the exhibition is overly optimistic about the future and portrays an austere Britain looking up to the consumerist America. Featuring sculptures, installations, artworks and designs that are economic, expendable, and ephemeral, the exhibition expresses Britain's angst to move away from the ruins to new and modern society. Theo Inglis (2015) also compares the exhibition to Disney's theme park. Ballard, Inglis argues, explores the darker side of 'yesterday's tomorrow'. The neo-avant-gardes' criticism of architecture's social idealism repeats many motifs, ethos and of the historical avant-gardes.

When critics remain undecided whether Ballard's text adheres to or deviates from new brutalism's aesthetics, and whether the neo-avant-garde is searching for a new future or repeating yesterday's tomorrow, Laura Colombino's study (2013) points out a middle ground. Noting existentialism's legacy on Ballard and the neo-avant-garde art circle, she traces the connection between the idea of 'home as skin' to the existentialist notion of being 'thrown' in the world. The concept of dwelling in Sartre and Heidegger's philosophy, for Colombino (2013, p28), is 'staying with and taking care of things'. New brutalism and Archigram are obsessed with constructing circular realms of familiarity in the estranging post-war environment. Architecture is a form of demarcation we draw to assert ourselves against the unknown space, and an organizing principle to make sense of the chaos we find ourselves in. Their as-found aesthetics and existentialist architecture is in continuity with the very modernism they purport to critique. As Colombino (2013) has analyzed, new brutalism and Archigram's as-found aesthetics reinvents the Baudelairean dialectic of the expendable and the memorable, which also influenced Benjamin's reading of the Parisian Arcades as a reservoir of dialectical images. On the one hand, Ballard fully embraces postmodernity where both the city and the individual can be reconstructed through modular composition and a set of permutations. On the other hand, by casting a backward look at these expendable materials from the future, his archaeological gaze counters the expendability of materials and images and gives them an ontological significance. Thus, Colombino (2013, p45) reads Ballard's novels as 'new myths are felt necessary to make sense of a world running too fast and short of interpretative keys'.

Casting a look back at historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde, we may arrive at two ways of reading 'form without utopia'. Firstly, the 'form without utopian' in *High-Rise* signals a self-reflexive, conceptual turn away from the totalitarian tendencies in modernist architecture. The mobility and anarchy of the new model of architecture, however, in liquidizing and escaping existing structures, inevitably meet new structures in new historical conditions. Secondly, tracing the existentialist vein in avant-garde's as-found aesthetics, 'form without utopia' is an everyday practice of bricolage that is not unique to the avant-garde intellectual in the confined realms of Art or Politics. From this layman perspective, the building's destruction can be irrelevant to the utopian impulses and totalizing ambitions that infuse both realms. This perspective can both illuminate a different face of the avant-garde and rescue the notion of the 'future'. *High-Rise* recovers a sense of future by illuminating the political possibilities in decadent materials and the discontinuity of cultural order, two aspects that I will analyze through talking about 'bricolage' and 'staircases'. Ballard's backward- looking posture is reiterated by contemporary artists, architects and scholars of material culture and could inspire a relook at the historical avant-gardes.

Bricolage

As Colombino (2013) notes, *High-Rise* is an existentialist architecture. Its motif of dwelling is underpinned by an existential angst to find home in a chaotic environment. These motifs continue to feature in thing theory and new materialism that occurred at the turn of the century. In light of these new discourses that also revisit avant-garde movements, we may bring the avant-garde outside venerated notions of Art and Politics and reconfigure it as an existentialist will to create a personalized order that is distinguished from that of the dominant cultural system. Meanwhile, this visionary power and universal will is potentially complicit in and is likely to be assimilated in looking for a new location in institutional expansion.

Blending Marxism and psychoanalysis, Bill Brown develops his thing theory in the 1990s and identifies an interest in outmoded materials in contemporary art that revisits surrealism's invigoration of cultural debris. Pop artist Claes Oldenburg's monumentally flaccid objects, for Brown (2001, p14), are a resurgence of ready-mades that highlights 'the

discrepancy between objectivity and materiality, perception and sensation'. Oldenburg's

Typewriter Eraser, based on an object rendered obsolete by today's digitized world, asks: 'will

the future of your present ever understand our rhetoric of inscription, erasure, trace?' (Brown,

2001, p16). Oldenburg's work reveals a 'belated' thingness in cultural objects and raises a

heightened awareness of our affective investment in / fetishization of objects. Thingness

emerges when things stop working for us and lie 'beyond the grid of intelligibility' (Brown,

2001, p5). The surrealists' use of cultural totems drives at the same purpose. Looking back at

the avant-garde art, Brown (2001, pp11-12) argues that 'by transforming the bricolage of the

dreamwork into the practice of everyday life, the surrealists registered their refusal to occupy

the world as it was. … modernism's resistance to modernity is its effort to deny the distinction

between subjects and objects, people and things'. In Brown's retrospection, modernism's

project is to forge a new subject-object relation that reveals the humanism that is invested in

objects. The decentreed humanism in a new subject-object relation, for Brown, is only too

belatedly echoed by Baudrillard's observation of the preponderance of objects.

We may follow Brown's analysis and conceptualize the avant-garde's compulsive play

with the grid form and experimentation with modular composition as a form of bricolage. The

ground zero provides a productive space of estrangement between a thing and a cultural

object, between human ideation and pure materiality. The grid artist then retrieves and

reclaims specificity, certainty, and unity from the general and aleatory scale of the institution.

What can be called a de-objectifying or decentreing process is dramatized in Ballard's short

story 'The Overloaded Man' (2006 [1961]). The protagonist, Faulkner, compulsively strips the

houses and furniture down to their most basic shapes and contours and rearranges them in his

mind. 'The dents in a cushion became as vivid as the craters of the moon, the folds in a curtain,

the ripples in the waves of identity. [...] his car in the garage, de-identified, it sat in the half-light

like an enormous vegetable marrow, flaccid and gleaming' (568). In a 'de-identifying' process,

he mentally reduces the masses of roofs and balconies to small squares, the sky to a blank field

of blue, an aircraft to a slim silver dart until they become 'highly personalised extensions of

himself' and '[cling] limply to [their] identity'. Things are momentarily divorced from their usage

and cultural identity. The objects dissected into basic units are then remapped onto Faulkner's body. Faulkner is plugged into 'a world of pure psychic sensation' (574) and the 'absolute continuum of existence uncontaminated by material excrescences' finally 'set[s] him free' (585).

Photography's emergence in the age of technological reproduction also facilitates a 'de-identifying' process that allows one to alter subject-object relations. The photographic vision is produced on an architectural level in *High-Rise*. The flattened, rectangular spaces of the building – the glass windows, TV screens, ornamental lakes, and swimming pools – turns space into a fluid visual field. Framed through the glass window, the 'rectangle of white sky' appears as 'the artificial ceiling of a film set' (156). Reality can be 'edited' as it is represented through screens. Exploring the 'textual reductionism' of and the 'constructivist method' of Benjamin's dialectical image in built landscape, Ross Lipton (2016, p75) sees in Corbusier's modernist architecture 'a utopian yearning for stasis, equilibrium and … imageability'. The clean geometrical surfaces satisfy a wish to increase the legibility of cityscape by recomposing it as a series of interconnected images.

In 'The Overloaded Man' (2006 [1967]), the protagonist Faulkner finds that 'a glass wall has been inserted between [the houses] and his own psyche' (574). As the screen contains reality in a field of manageable risks and navigable uncertainties, the individual viewer watches reality with simultaneous proximity and distance. Ballard's short story 'Motel Architecture' (2006 [1978]) is often read as an extreme case of the alienating effect of the media culture. In the short story, the protagonist Pangborn lives alone in a small solarium, a fully equipped television studio. His activities are restricted to an endless editing of the murder sequence in Hitchcock's classic film *Psycho* (1960).

> The extraordinary relationship between the geometry of the shower stall and the anatomy of the murdered woman's body seemed to hold the clue to the real meaning of everything in Pangborn's world, to the unstated connections between his own musculature and the immaculate glass and chromium universe of the solarium (733).

In the repetitive collage of his body and domestic objects, Pangborn's identity dissolves into a composite of visual jigsaw and fragments. Working as 'the star, script writer and director' of his own private channel, he tries to reconstruct meaning from juxtapositions and trace these visual

'clues' like a detective. The readers follow his attempt to identify 'an invisible intruder' who turns out to be himself. He inspects the 'criminal' through documenting his own washing, eating, walking, and even breathing with a camera: 'The man had washed his hands with the fresh bar of soap, a small portion of the steak and salad had been eaten, a strange footprint marked the talc in the bathroom' (745). Pangborn's schizophrenia culminates as he kills the cleaner in the bathroom, copying of the murder act in *Psycho,* where the mother and the alter-ego of the schizophrenic motel owner, Normal Bates, murders his young female tenant in the shower stall. In the famous 45-second 'shower scene' that has become the hallmark in film history, Hitchcock uses fast edits and fast-motion reverse shots to portray nudity and violence. The iconic status of the film in enriching the language for visual violence (against naked women in private space) in cinema lends itself to many remakes, the most extreme of which is Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998), which is a shot-to-shot and scene-to-scene copy of the original. Sant's remake and Pangborn's compulsive reediting are not pointless. Played against the fluid diegetic space of *Psycho*, they highlight the artificial construction of the original film and the material basis of a seemingly dematerialized space.

As the glass windows are fractured, the visual spaces in *High-Rise* no longer resemble a repressive structure of the panopticon; they reveal a material basis and can be 'reedited' by the residents. When Laing looks down at the room below during his foraging, a circular glass bottle turns into a deep well. Even the 'garbage-strewn carpet' transforms into an 'electric flora' (109) in the camera flash. 'Broken mirror flickering like the fragments of another world trying unsuccessfully to reconstitute itself' (110) and '[t]he light reflected off the chromium trim of hundreds of cars fills the air with knives' (103). The abundance of optical language and perspectival shifts is ambiguous: on the one hand, it hints at the purely 'visual' and 'formal' transformation of urban reality. As the tenants are lost in optical illusions, the architecture is caged in total darkness and is more stably rooted in its secluded suburban site. On the other hand, these images unveil the technological and material basis of photography and bring to light its utopian potential to reconstruct reality through illuminating and 'editing' its material constituents. Imbued with transformative, psychedelic energy, these scenes harken back to the utopian impulse of photography to extract specificity and identity from the impersonal and

totalizing urban environment by shattering its rigid structure. Under the working of the camera, the hard, unchanging reality unfolds into palpable parts, and disintegrates into modular units in a serialized, sequential form, which then become accessible to the photographer as bricoleur.

Media technology contains the utopian potential to shape reality into a repository of moral possibilities (Dant, 1999). The serialized programs and the dispersed mores create the same liberating and rejuvenizing effect as the surrealist juxtapositions and collage. As reality is presented as an aleatory range of morally ambiguous possibilities, the individual viewer is embedded within the vicissitudes of everyday life as a free moral agent. In *High-Rise*, human associations lose immediacy and are governed by performative relations, which is exemplified by Laing's ritualistic sex act with Charlotte, and their neighbors who are 'a pair of social agents unconvincingly trying to establish a marital role' (19).

Wilder's film-editing is another form of bricolage that imbricates the body into an aleatory sequence of materials. His nomadic investigation of the building is accompanied by a cine-camera, whose role becomes 'wholly emblematic' after its lenses are fractured (156). Wilder records and edits his grunts and belches on a tape-recorder to develop 'a skill that now resided entirely in his scarred fingers with their cracked and blackened nails' (129). As an obsolete medium, the tape recorder reveals rich possibilities in its technological and material basis. Wilder re-establishes a contingent relationality between his body and the material of the recorder. His recording and editing involve a repeated interactive process where forms of body and forms of material interpenetrate. Wilder, the editor, is also a weaver as Tim Ingold (2000) describes in his anthropological study of basketry. Ingold notes that the concrete form of the basket does not come from the weaver's mind as an idea but through the gradual unfolding of the field of forces set up through the practitioner's active and sensuous engagement with the material. The weaving process happens in a relational field; the error, chance, and unpredictability cannot be eliminated. In what can be called an 'autopoetic' process, 'the temporal rhythms of life are built into the structural properties of things' (Ingold, 2000, p16). The artefact of the basket is a 'crystallization of activity within a relational field' (Ingold, 2000, p62) whose formal regularity comes from the regularity of movement. Thinking along the line of Heidegger, Ingold (2000, p69) defines dwelling as an 'ongoing temporal interweaving of our

lives with the manifold constituents of our environment'. In Wilder's case, there are no set patterns to be mechanically transcribed and no ideal form to be actualized. The generation of the tape relies on real-time editing, a rhythmic repetition of movement his fingers perform. Editing is an improvisational and contingent process that relies on a feedback loop as he plays the tape back to himself. They connect with reality through a repetitive interaction with the piecemealed elements of life.

Tim Dant (1999) also notes the absence of a 'sociology' of things and how we tend to take things for granted and only notice them when they break down. Drawing on Heidegger 's notion of building as the construction of material forms to establish a form of life, he (1999) argues that social relations are organized around home objects through the way we keep home, use space and arrange materials. Following De Certeau's point about the ritualistic nature of bricolage, he (1999) adds that bricolage shapes everyday habits and routines. We derive meaning, construct identity, and form social relations through the act of keeping, arranging, and relating to material forms. Giving birth to new material forms and aesthetic experiences, bricolage participates the formation of a new political subjectivity.

In *High-Rise,* the residents make home and reconstruct identity through 'bricolaging' objects. As the hegemonic image of the building breaks into a loose collection of material forms, Laing reuses waste materials and run-down furniture to build a new future.

> Laing sat down among the empty bottles and refuse on the kitchen floor. He gazed up at the derelict washing-machine and refrigerator, now only used as garbage bins. He found it hard to remember what their original function had been. To some extent they had taken on a new significance, a role that he had yet to understand. Even the run-down nature of the high-rise was a model of the world into which the future was carrying them, a landscape beyond tech where everything was either derelict or, more ambiguously, recombined in unexpected but more meaningful ways (147).

When the washing-machine and refrigerator are used as garbage bins, their basic form of a container overshadows their technical function. Form is divorced from its situatedness in objects. Laing, the bricoleur, assigns them new meanings and uses them creatively to perform diverse tasks. As he creatively deploys these derelict objects, his body is also imbricated in its ordering in a 'de-identifying' process. Immersed in the new environment, his body parts exchange with external elements in a direct, unmediated, and unpredictable way. Laing

envisions a new model, new significance and a new role that is not yet comprehensible. The dystopian dereliction means more than pessimistic decay but signals a new future. Taking care of the two women, cooking them an Alsatian dog and giving them morphine doses, Laing assumes the role of a male protector. His identity of a man-in-charge is fabricated through the making do with materials, and through performing the rituals of cleaning, cooking, and feeding.

Bricolage shapes community. As the tenants discard their social roles and revert to a tribal lifestyle, the novel gives a panoramic picture of how different people appropriate materials to reestablish boundaries and regroup themselves into clans. The clan members invent new forms of dwelling outside the hegemonic value system. The home they construct, 'a huge barricade of furniture' and 'a miniature municipal dump in its own right' (123), is a flexible structure that can be modulated freely. The disintegrating order of the building initiates liberation from the uniform structural organization, and reintroduces danger to the previously coded, protected lives of the inhabitants. As rival residents build new territories with familiar objects, they restore the balance between risk and control. They carry radios, cameras, flash equipment for detection and communication, use garbage sacks as barricades to guard their corridors, and build shelters of irregular shapes, fluid boundaries and covet passages. The tenants have also invented a contingent communication system to navigate an unknown, hazardous environment. Walls are covered with 'slogans, obscenities', and the stairwell doors are doodled with 'a military-style message' to mark usable staircases (119). Wilder's chest is covered with painted lines that give him 'a potent sense of identity' (155-156). Space is no longer governed by a prescribed order. With the power failure in the building, the steady electric light is replaced by the flickering unstable light source, affording a more affective relation to the environment. Royal guards himself against the mobs below by creating a soft and amorphous circle of light. 'The candlelight flickered over the silver cutlery and gold plate, reflected in the silk facings of his dinner jacket' and the 'illuminated decks of the nearby building' (132). Spaces mediated by new material relations become palpable; to navigate these spaces, they develop a new sensitivity grounded in hearing, smell and touch. Laing 'felt proud of having learned how to move around the pitch-black corridors' (109) by staying close to the floor. He listens to the 'secret murmurs of the building', 'sinister trickles of sound' (146), the

'faint changes of tone' (145) coming from water-pipes. He and Steele would 'take turns standing with their hands pressed against the metal walls of an elevator shaft, feeling the vibrations transmitted to their bodies'. He recognizes a faint spray of urine as 'the characteristic odour' (147) of the building. 'As he inhaled the stale air he was refreshed by his odour, almost recognising parts of his body -- his feet and genitalia, the medley of smells that issued from his mouth' (104). The different ideological roles of the characters dissolve. They are conflated as survivors in disparate corners in the 'pulsating organism' of the building. They invert the prescribed ways of using space, remap territories, and create a fluid sense of meaning and identity.

Staircases

Architecture is another form of 'motion sculpture'. When the building disintegrates, its artificial operations come into light. Wilder's ascent and the residents' revolt happen around a series of liminal spaces – elevators and staircases, which also enlightens us to reconceptualize the cultural system as inherently broken and discontinuous. The discontinuity and diversity of forms amend Marxist view of a singular, totalizing cultural order.

Anthropologist Daniel Miller's (2012) strand of thing theory investigates the object-subject relation outside the human-centric materialism in Marxist theory. His approach to commodities as artifacts also offers a corrective to Baudrillard's (1988) understanding of the commodity as an interchangeable sign in a semiotic system. In Baudrillard's (1988) theoretical analysis that applies semiology to objects, a commodity has an allegorical form that evokes an ideal function, and consumption is close to reading a cultural code. Miller (2012), among other anthropologists and sociologists, take issue with Baudrillard's (1988) definition of consumption. For Miller (2012, p28), consumption is not always evil and corrupt; people extract their own humanity using consumption 'as the creation of a specificity, which is held to negate the generality and aleatory scale of the institutions from which they receive goods and services'. Consuming involves a gradual transformation and appropriation of materials to make them your own. In his 1988 research on 40 council-flat kitchens in North London, Miller (1988) investigates how the tenants re-appropriate consumer goods to decorate their kitchens and

make them home. He acknowledges bricolage as a way of extracting the specificity from the alienating and general nature of things and making commodities meaningful to humans. Groups of different genders and ethnicities have different ways of appropriating goods to negotiate heterogeneous dwelling experiences. The meaning of consumption is specific to users rather than determined by production and distribution. The productive labour invested in their consuming activities needs close observation and monitoring before they are dismissed as signifiers of capitalism.

In his militant critique of *Capitalism and Architecture*, Tafuri, among other Marxist thinkers, tends to perceive culture as a (non)place structure, a hegemonic, unchanging hierarchical form that renders the individual powerless. Culture, Levine argues, is not an overarching totality. A coherent system with one single cause in close examination is composed of 'loosely and unevenly collected arrangements, a makeshift pasted-together order' (Levine, 2015, p17). Forms exist on many planes and layers, colliding and overlapping with each other. The hierarchical form, Levine argues, is much less stable than we think. Its gradation creates an imbalance of power and invites mobilization of fixated positions. The ideal of a hierarchy arranges bodies, things, and ideas according to levels of power or importance. However, hierarchy exerts a far less orderly and systematic domination over its participants and is limited by material conditions. As I argued in the introduction, Levine's (neo)formalism or infrastructuralism that looks at the mobility and situatedness of forms departs from both Marxism's structuralist and postmodernism's anti-/post-structuralist approach to culture. Investigating how forms work on different scales in particular times and spaces is crucial to enforce political change.

While *High-Rise* lays bare capital's persistent modeling of non-places, it also reveals the way these places are not empty, homogeneous replications of a certain hierarchical principle. Rather, the building is a fragile infrastructure consisting of material forms that are not as stable as they seem. Architecture cannot be abstracted into a formal principle. The monolithic form of high-rise turns out to encompass a host of discordant, dynamic forms in a complex infrastructural system of 'urban metabolism', including the circulation of water, air, food, electricity, and waste which experience countless slippages and requires constant maintenance

by human forces. In the novel, the imbalance embedded in the hierarchical form gives rise to its own momentum of riot and motion. Wilder's journey upwards, like Vaughan's car crashes and Maitland's flaneur footsteps, brushes the hierarchy of the high-rise against its grain and brings into light the technological, material basis of the non-place structure and the inequalities and uneven geographies hidden in its spatial design. While people on higher floors are given access to high-speed elevators and squash courts as mobile elites, people who live on low levels of the buildings feel ossified and immobilized. The right to mobility is central to the claim to power.

The linkage points that buttress the hierarchical form – stairs elevators and corridors - also become sites of protest. In his ascending, Wilder constantly makes use of a series of liminal spaces that tend to be overlooked due to their infrastructural nature. These structural links and connective points that buttress the vertical architecture, when outmoded, become sites for protests and revolution: 'informal clans [span] two or three floors based on the architecture of corridors, lobbies and elevators'. Residents host 'informal meetings' and 'forums' at corridors and elevator lobbies to air their problems, prejudices, and grievances (39). These transitory and connective spaces become battlefields for social struggle to transcend the unitary classification of a powerful mega-structure. The stair symbolizes a spatial arrangement that advocates a striving upwards, an orientational metaphor for the progressive desire weaved in our form of living (Butt, 2016). The stairs, like the motorway, transform from a two-way linear linkage to a platform, a potentially generative space for irregular mobility practices and a mediator of alternative social relations. They are alternatively appropriated as new grounds to establish human association.

The stairs act as a richly inhabited space of encounter and acts of engagement. A masseuse from the 5th floor, when giving Wilder a lift upwards in her freight elevator, imparts to him knowledge of the neglected spaces of airshafts. One of the 'vagrants' and 'denizens of an interior world who formed a second invisible population' (64), she wanders around the high-rise via entertaining rides on elevators. Like Jane and Proctor in *Concrete Island*, the female vagrant is a marginalized figure who takes unusual, adventurous routes alternative to regular routines. Under her guidance, Wilder moves 'up and down a maze of corridors' and explores the infrastructural spaces of the middle and upper levels of the building. He discovers the

'mysterious movements of the air-hostesses as they pursued their busy social lives' (14), the confrontation between a group of children and a cost-accountant on the 10th floor shopping concourse, the rivalry between dog-owners and parents of small children, and the dispute over the disposal system, which is overloaded by the beautician's old rugs, small furniture, electronic baby-minders and special mashers, appliances needed to fulfil maternal responsibilities. His mobility exposes the ad-hoc way the residents draw spatial boundaries in designated public areas for their own private purposes and their heterogeneous ways of using space.

Contextualizing Ballard's 'dystopian' work in the post-utopian moment after modernism's failure or death, his motifs of decadence and brokenness and his backward-looking posture embody a hopeful look at a new future. This hope for future is expressed in an alternative way of conceptualizing 'art' and 'life'. Departing from solid structures and built facts, both are conceived as a 'makeshift paste-together order' that is created contingently in the moment. Such 'future' is not new, but 'yesterday's tomorrow': the outlook has already occurred in historical avant-garde's experiments with obsolete forms and new iconographies, which also attempted to redefine both art and life. This flicker of hope is captured in the imagery in the second last paragraph of *High-Rise,* which again calls to mind Benjamin's dialectical image*:*

> Dusk has settled, and the embers of the fire glowed in the darkness. The silhouette of the large dog on the spit resembled the flying figure of a mutilated man, soaring with immense energy across the night sky, embers glowing with the fire of jewels in his skin (173).

The fire, the flickering light, and the ascendent position of a flight to convey a hopeful state, a state of preparation and anticipation. The 'functional' life activity is conflated with an artistic invention. As the silhouette takes away the specificity of the objects, they are sculpted together in an obscure visual image. The progressive line of history is also interrupted. The scene at the end, which is set in the dusk, repeats the scene in the beginning of the novel, apparently set in the dawn when Laing is sitting on the balcony eating his dog before setting off to work. In the ambiguous time between dusk and dawn, there is 'no obvious beginning' (7). Time is 'dialectics (dawn and dusk) in a standstill'. The language also blurs the line between darkness and light, fear and hope, dereliction in the past and anticipation of an unknown future. The dereliction

and the delay of ideation, and the refusal to assign meaning to a new form point not to pessimism, loss, and decay, but a new future. The scene captures a moment of mythical stillness when the state of brokenness is pregnant with reformative energy.

3. A Third Recuperation? Modernism's Afterlife/Death in 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista'

For Ballard, modernism has a life and many afterlives. The 'heroic' utopian project, although failed and 'dead' after the catastrophe in the municipal high-rise estates in St Louis, 'survives in every high-rise sink estate of the time' and continues to exist today in implicit, coded forms, akin to the way that the unconscious expresses itself in 'slips of tongue'.

> Modernism saw off the dictators, and among its last flings were Brasilia, the Festival of Britain and Corbusier's state capital buildings at Chandigarh in India. But it was dying on its pilotis, those load-bearing pillars with which Corbusier lifted his buildings into the sky. Its slow death can be seen, not only in the Siegfried line and the Atlantic wall, but in the styling of Mercedes cars, at once paranoid and aggressive, like medieval German armour. We see its demise in 1960s kitchens and bathrooms, white-tiled laboratories that are above all clean and aseptic, as if human beings were some kind of disease. We see its death in motorways and autobahns, stone dreams that will never awake, and in the turbine hall at that middle-class disco, Tate Modern - a vast totalitarian space that Albert Speer would have admired, so authoritarian that it overwhelms any work of art inside it (Ballard, 2023[2006], p146).

Modernism's 'lingering life' is conflated with a 'slow death'. Its unresolved tangle of impulses continues to shape the built environment. The personified modernism travels across time and space, experiencing repeated deaths/revival in various types of formalized formlessness, organized anarchy, rhythmic dissonance, and totalized diversity – from the stylized car crashes to the willed madness of gated community. Modernism's life and death, as well as the life and death of the avant-garde, has mixed hope and risk. Its uncertain topography begs constant rereading / decoding.

In the final section of this chapter, I will talk about Ballard's resonance with contemporary architecture through a reading of 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista'. In what looks like the third recuperation of the avant-garde in cybernetic architecture, architecture is grounded in a 'cyberbia' with mixed hope and danger. The story begins with 'no one ever comes to Vermilion Sands now' (185) and ends with 'One day soon, whatever the outcome, I

know I shall have to switch the house on' (208). With a circular narrative that appears closed, the short story, like *High-Rise* also has 'no obvious beginning'. However, both the protagonist Howard and the *High-Rise* residents are more than passive victims or mental patients experiencing repeated trauma. Through reconstituting the derelict materials, they claim their ownership of the place. The life and death of modernism, like the life and death of the psychotropic house depends on its owner, who decides when to 'switch it on'.

Despite the repeated deaths in suppressive regimes, modernism's dream of mobility is persistent. With the bankruptcy of the modernist model of finalized, permanent architectural projects, contemporary architecture continues to depart from the designer-centreed top-down approach and move towards just-in-time customization and production without prototype. With a nod back at Tafuri's 'form without utopia', contemporary architecture strives to be a modular, mobile form more flexibly responsive to the user's affective, immersive experience of the environment. Assisted by computer science, AI and bio-nanotechnology, future home spaces are going through a significant revolution. Exploring the possibilities that new materials and technology have to offer, architects expect a residential place to function like an organism moving towards a 'new softness' (Kretzer, 2017, p167). The turn is enhanced by an environmental concern and joined by the call to build green cities with vertical gardens, living roofs, and eco-sculptures (Ackerman, 2012). The architectural vision also coincides with a new notion of space in geography that is ever becoming and evolving. The concept of man-architecture symbiosis also resonates with posthuman claims to blur the line between organic and man-made and expand the limit of humanity.

The speculative and experimental aspect of Ballard's work becomes an inspiration for customized and adaptive architecture while the dystopian aspects are mainly interpreted as an anti-establishment ethos. Nic Clear (2009) uses Ballard's work to call for a new agenda of architecture that prioritizes the inhabitants' needs and contingent interactions with the environment over the designer's intention. Ballard's texts have inspired architects to develop a more adaptive approach that does not aim at creating permanently functional structures but strives to create meaningful experiences for individuals in shifting time and space. In envisioning new forms of dwelling, the psychotropic (PT) house in Ballard's short story 'The

Thousand Dreams of Stellavista' is held as the prototype of cybernetic architecture and posthuman dwelling (Ackerman, 2012, Didakis and Philips, 2013, Kretzer, 2017).

> The real trouble was that most of Vermilion Sands is composed of early, or primitive-fantastic psychotropic, when the possibilities offered by the new bio-plastic medium rather went to architects' heads. [...] the first PT houses had so many senso-cells distributed over them, echoing every shift of mood and position of the occupants, that living in one was like inhabiting someone else's brain (190).

For architect Ionut Dohotariu (2021, p2), the idea of adaptive architecture, i.e. architecture that incorporates intelligent materials to adjust dynamically to the environment and inhabitants, is a product of SF literature in the 60s and early 70s, of which Ballard's PT house is a prominent example. Drawing on Heidegger, Didakis and Philips (2013, p310) regard the PT house as the predecessor of 'cyberdomesticity' where computational systems are embedded in home spaces to form a symbiosis with the inhabitants and fundamentally alter their perceptions. The PT house's 'kinetic form with animalistic behaviors' (Didakis and Philips, 2013, p307) formulates a way of posthuman dwelling in an affective space and a communicative interface that provides the resident with physical and emotional support. The fiction is a source of inspiration for Didakis's (2012) *Plinthos Pavilion*, an art installation that uses digital and electronic technology to bring memory, experience and perception within space. In his 2012 project inspired by the PT house, Felecia Davis (Davis et al, 2013) uses textiles with electronic sensors to build responsive architecture creates *Textile Mirror*, a prototype wall panel that responds to people's emotional states and assists their emotional expressions. The posthuman idea of plastic, digitized, customized, adaptive and symbiotic architecture continues to appeal to the primal condition of the human to assimilate into the environment in a vital mode of survival, using existentialism, surrealism, Archigram and new materialism as theoretical and methodological frameworks.

Tracing the historical background of transformable architecture, Kretzer sees the application of information material in architectural spaces as a continuation of Archigram's pursuit of building kinetically adaptable houses to enable nomadic ways of dwelling. Steering away from algorithmic perfection and technocratic totalitarianism, and incorporating bio-nanotechnology and customized crafting, they look forward to future homes with a different topology, where the boundary the organic and man-made further dissolves and gives way to

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more flexible forms and diverse relations. Departing from a permanent abode or static container, Archigram designs architecture to be a wearable clothing to be plugged into the city as a circuit. Its mobility is not unrestricted. Akin to a car or spaceship, a mobile house is a camouflage that helps the urban nomad navigate the increasingly fluctuating and endlessly mutating social landscape. In line with Archigram's stress on a vital mode of living, contemporary urban theory seeks to confront the feral, military, and contingent prospect in the future urban (Clear, 2009).

As contemporary architects align Ballard's texts with a self-reflexive poetics against modernist architecture's utopian planning mindset and a neo-avant-garde look at a new future of living, the dark connotation in his circular narrative and the backward posture in the 'form without utopian' tends to be overlooked. Through a close reading of 'A Thousand Dreams of Stellavista', I will point out the circular pattern and backward posture in posthuman architecture's call for a new mobile future. In the story's circular narrative of a haunted house, modernism experiences another round of revival, which is also its slow death in the hands of its archenemy of totalitarianism.

The short story is set in *Vermilion Sands*, an imaginary suburb and seaside resort, a futuristic landscape of yesterday's novelty and 'one-time playground' of film celebrities. The abandoned landscape of Stellavista with empty palazzos, overgrown gardens and drained swimming pools is haunted by a sense of obsolescence: 'The whole place was degenerating like an abandoned amusement park, but there was enough bizzare extravagance in the air' (185). The obsolete materialities and their 'bizarre extravagance' bear a mocking witness to the transience of human whim, and its assimilation into quick cycles of fashionable designs, which cater to bourgeois' taste and mobile lifestyle. Guided by the housing agent, Stamers, to view the properties in Stellavista, the protagonist Howard and his wife Fay are two 'exhilarated' and 'unwary clients' (185). Their 'bourgeois respectability' makes them an easier prey to the housing agency (185). The first PT house that draws the couple's attention is one that 'would have shaken even an old-guard surrealist on a heroin swing' (185). Consisting of six spheres in a suspended position, 'the entire slightly tarnished structure hung down into the weeds poking through the cracked concrete court like a collection of forgotten spaceships in a vacant lot'

(186). The house recuperates the historical avant-garde's dream of mobility and reiterates its posture of departure and flight.

Howard eventually moves into 99 Stellavista, driven by an infatuation with its former tenant, actress Gloria Tremayne, who has killed her husband, architect Miles Vanden Starr, in a rebellious rage. Savoring her presence in the house, Howard reenacts Starr's abusive behavior and nearly misses Tremayne's vengeful murder performed by the house. He refuses to switch off the property and is willingly subjected to its repeated process of destruction and recuperation. The abusive husband, Starr, is an architect 'flowering out of 1950-ish groups with Le Corbusier and Lloyd Wright, stalking about some housing project in Chicago or Tokyo like a petty dictator, heavy-jowled, thyroidal, with large lustreless eyes' (199). In Starr's figure, Le Corbusier's cosmopolitanism is gendered: it is reconfigured as a masculine impulse of a paternal authority to stabilize, monitor, and regulate an uncontrollable feminine energy represented by the *femme fatale* figure of Tremayne. As freedom and control, liberalism and authoritarianism are entangled in Le Corbusier's 'house as skin', the PT house's adaptability is also achieved through a generic modelling. In providing customized service, the PT house embeds a new form of infrastructure that exerts control over the inhabitant. The agent Stammers claims that the custom-built units and the vinyl chains in the plastex have been 'hand-crafted literally molecule by molecule' (188). The meticulous handcraft and engineering makes the house highly adaptable and attentive to the user's needs. The seat can adjust itself to the human form: 'Stammers sat down on the lip, which quickly expanded to match the contours of his body, providing back and arm rests' (188).

Although the property endeavors to implement an accurate personalization of each tenant, the cybernetic system is grounded on an average algorithm. Its response is not uniquely triggered by him but overlaid with recapitulations of a pedigree of previous events. The pedigree adds to the property's value and maximizes its efficiency as interactivity depends on a permutation of personal data provided by the customers themselves. Its adaptability relies on a standardization that preempts the possibility of originality, and only enforces one affective experience to overlay another. Howard attempts to utilize 'a healthy set of reflexes' of happy spouses to fix his marriage with Fay. He quickly finds out that the PT house is given

'unnecessarily subtle memories', 'far too sensitive' and makes 'absurdly exaggerated responses' to his moods, respiratory rhythms and motions. The negative emotions, suicidal drives and hostility of previous tenants make the house 'ill' and 'defensive' (188). During the demonstration, a replay of these past experiences causes the house to convulse drastically, from which the Howard, Fay, and Stamer escape just in time. Howard is less in control of the house's response than passively subjected to the random permutation of a history of memories, which through temporal disjuncture affords an illusory sense of freedom. The commercial model of PT house repeats avant-garde's recuperation into the cultural industry. The PT house also reiterates Le Corbusier's mathematical and geometrical method of permutation, which lends itself to installing a subtler form of infrastructure of control.

The entanglement between novelty and debris, generalization and customization still ring true in today's cunningly reactive and sophisticated cyber-architecture. We have already seen how contemporary architecture in the past three to four decades, such as parametricism, uses computer-based design to create the most impossible shapes and curves. Some architects (Spiller, 2009, p124) have expressed worries about architectural speculation degenerating into an unfettered pursuit of novelties 'seduced by the computer's ethereal muse'. Kretzer (2016) also points out the possibility of superficial material application, where technology is used to create sensational visual effects and aesthetically appealing facades. The 'euphoric and highly speculative visionary designs' (Kretzer, 2016, p173) to upgrade visual experience result in quick successions of waste materials. The whimsical, arbitrary computer-generated architecture in contemporary times has once again channeled Archigram's subversive energy into mass production.

In Didakis and Philips's vision of domesticating cybernetics (2013), the digital technology and sensor network should be inserted in a covert way, which in other words is to build an invisible and ubiquitous infrastructural system to optimize usage and performance. The ultimate goal is to craft a home environment that monitors and modifies human behaviour, to create a disciplined, digitized space sensitively responsive to the most minute unconscious need of the user, to 'sense and adjust innermost feelings' and 'to know the range of its possible applications'. It is believed that 'a new cartography of living experience should be established in

order to minimize confusion, disarranged traditions, misfits and failed control' (Didakis and Philips, 2013, p313). However, the cartography of experiences might enforce a form of emotional and moral policing, as it begs the question: how do we evaluate emotional experiences and how do we define 'misfits'? What might be ubiquitously inserted and invisibly embedded along with the cybernetic system is the culturally bounded discourse of what is right/moral/healthy. The idea of orchestrating a huge mechanism that enumerates all possible modes of interactions, eliminates malfunctions, and penetrates the innermost corner of the user's psyche is not too far from the traditional architectural paradigm with a hegemonic structure, except that hard concrete and steel are replaced by soft, amorphous materials.

The PT house is less responsive to the user's personal needs than providing a collective of repeatable responses that can be shuffled by chance. The tenant becomes a free moral agent to balance risk and control through coordinating his will with the random shuffle of a wide range of affective experiences. Trying to sell a defective and potentially dangerous PT house to Howard, Stammers says that it will be 'an exciting challenge' and 'a new dimension in living' (189). The sales strategy reveals that the fantasy of the PT house is to introduce new stimuli into a bubble of security and privacy. Uncertainty and danger are injected to spice up a new bourgeois lifestyle. Howard also admits that he comes to Vermilion Sands to 'make his round of the bridge tables and dinner parties, tactfully stimulating a little righteous will-paring and contract-breaking' (189).

Howard uses the house to reenact his infatuation with Tremayne, which sums up how star industry is constructed on mystification of female enigma. Tremayne's murder case ten years ago is another 'myth manufactured by a thousand publicity agents'. 'The sensation is the real thing' - it brings the world to a temporary halt and 'when she was acquitted the world began to revolve again' (195). Howard ritualistically goes through an archive of Tremayne's traces in the house, which is a 'shrine that entombed the very signatures of her soul' (196). He turns the volumes up and down in a tactful way and varying his moods to evoke maximum response from her. He achieves a kinetic harmony with the house. The house as skin is also house as mirror, an extension of the narcissistic self. The house provides an entirely imitative and receptive realm which facilitates the free flow of his suppressed sadist desire and

unconscious resentment towards his wife. The serene persona of Tremayne subsides with Fay's departure, and Starr's violent personality comes out and takes over the property 'like a thundercloud'. In a rage at Fay's departure, Howard deliberately irritates the house by performing a series of destructive acts. Recapitulating Starr's abuse of Tremayne, he also brings back her vengeful personality and nearly escapes her attempt to murder him.

In what looks like a third recuperation of the avant-garde into adaptive architecture, architects have appropriated the PT house in 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista' as a prototype of an endlessly morphing interface that forms a dynamic symbiosis with the inhabitant. The text traces a pedigree of avant-garde practices and predecessors of the idea 'house as skin' and teased out its hidden, unconscious desire for control, voyeurism, and surveillance. With explicit reference to Le Corbusier and using a narrative of haunting and psychoanalysis, it has pointed out the backward posture and ritualistic pattern of this seemingly progressive, innovative practice. The design driven by technological novelty and consumer interest creates layers of ruins and destruction that haunt the progressive project. In contemporary architecture's dream of adaptability using information technology, there is a risk of installing a new form of infrastructural control. Stripped of the technological glamor, these increasingly imaginative and mobile architectural forms make repeated returns to primeval themes of dwelling and self-insertion that involves an interpenetration between bodily and material forms, and the imbrication into a serialized order.

The psychoanalytic and trauma narrative can also be interpreted in a different way that reveals the utopian potentials in 'cyberbia'. Ballard's PT house predates what architect Marcos Novak (1991, p272-5) calls 'liquid architecture in cyberspace'. Describing himself as a 'trans-architect', Novak (1991, p273) looks forward to a 'liquid architecture in cyberspace', which 'breathes, pulses, leaps as one form and lands as another' and 'whose form is contingent on the interests of the beholder'. It is a type of architecture 'cut loose from the expectation of logic, perspective and the laws of gravity'. Repeating the gravity-free, 'bivalent' structure of the modernist grid, Novak's liquid architecture is where 'Science and art, the worldly and the spiritual, the contingent and the permanent' (Novak, 1991, p273) converge. Cyberspace is a form of 'cyberbia', the meeting place of computer/information technology and the human

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body/mind. It harnesses the potential in digital technology to reduce 'selves, objects and processes to the same underlying ground-zero representation as binary streams'. Akin to the 'de-identifying' process of photography, digital technology break selves and objects into remappable units to 'uncover previously invisible relations' in visual representations. Thus, cyberspace becomes the 'habitat of imagination', where poetic imagination can be mapped onto what we perceive to be concrete reality. During such mapping, the creative and non-linear aspects of the mind (hopes, desires, memories) are expressed. Cyberspace is where 'poetic thinking' disturbs 'linear thinking' and 'random access memory' disturbs 'sequential access memory' (Novak, 1991, p274). In other words, memory is no longer stored in a fixed sequential order but can be retrieved in unpredictable, 'autopoetic' ways. Liquid architecture is a type of trans-architecture that is undergoing perpetual metamorphosis, and time is incorporated into the poetics of space as 'the fourth dimension' that can be edited (Novak, 1991, p273).

Drawing on psychoanalytic language, Novak describes cyberspace as a place 'where conscious dreaming meets subconscious dreaming, a landscape of rational magic, of mystical reason'. The PT house is also such a dream-architecture, or the architectural form of the dream image, which allows for a controlled, rationalized, harnessed, sculpted expressions of the unconscious energy. In Howard's final conversation with Stamers, his 'initial feelings of shock' soon gave way to 'an almost hysterical sense of fun'. The serious tragedy becomes a game. He self-consciously frames the dwelling experience as a form of psycho-therapy that goes both ways.

> 'The place must have been insane. If you ask me, it needs a psychiatrist to straighten it out.'

> 'You're right,' I told him. 'In fact, that was exactly my role - to reconstruct the original traumatic situation and release the repressed material.'

> 'Why joke about it? It tried to kill you.' (207)

Here the power relation is flipped. The house is more than a therapeutic device for Howard to perform repetitive psychotherapy on himself. The house becomes the patient, and the victim takes on the role of the psychiatrist. Howard is not at all an unwilling victim, but a self-conscious director, editor, and photographer. His operations pump aura out of the house and

demystify it by releasing its unseen and unexplored unconscious optics. In the culminating sequence where Howard struggles to escape the murder attempt of Tremayne's ghost, the house turns to a spectacular site, in a deformed and ruptured state. Compared to a 'cocoon' which bisects itself, the house gives birth to unexpected patterns and geometries. Walls are buckled, the floor curls up with 'thick veins' knotting across it. The house is an extricated wound and a 'ruptured flower' revealing its unconscious optic. The 'deformed rooms and twisted corridors', like the broken furniture and reused materials in *High-Rise*, now bear his character and constitute his identity (206). 'Gloria Tremayne was still there, and I was sure that Vanden Starr had at last gone' (207). Like a powerful sorcerer in full mastery of the house/his own psyche, he can freely decide which part to exorcise and which to preserve, when to begin the cathartic process and when to terminate it.

For Novak (1991, p275), liquid architecture lies in a shift from Cartesian distinction to a perception of objective reality as a construct of the mind. The only reality is 'the reality of the fiction'. To choose to inhabit the house is to choose to displace 'reality' with 'embodied fiction'. The difference between the two, according to Novak, is that 'we are the authors of fiction' and 'fiction is there to serve our purpose, serious or playful'. To choose to inhabit the house to be the author of reality as 'embodied fiction'. The author is also a technician, juggling the switches in the body/mind/house as machine.

To summarize, in light of the recuperation thesis laid out by architect theorist Manfredo Tafuri, the brutalist mega-structure in *High-Rise* is in line with Le Corbusier's design modernism which combines the avant-garde's double impulses for freedom and control, liberalism and authoritarianism. As the building breaks down, brokenness and formlessness give birth to another aesthetic form and acts as the principle for a new type of architecture, which is susceptible to new modeling, standardization, and mass production. In light of contemporary thing theory and material culture, the avant-garde artist is a bricoleur who seeks to establish a new subject-object relation, in which the subject's assertive will gives way to a receptive following of an internal order in the aleatory permutation of objects. Before avant-garde's plugging into the machinic Spectacle and Commodity, the seed of receptiveness and passivity, is already germinating in the initial radical departure. The disruptive poetics of defamiliarization,

montage, collage necessarily calls for its counterpart: recuperation, assimilation, and unity. The recuperation thesis does not simply suggest fatalism but draws our attention to the linkage points and liminal moments in between mobilization and stabilization.

Chapter Three – Suburbia and Time in *Vermilion Sands* and *The Unlimited Dream Company*

In a 1970 interview with Lynn Barber for the Penthouse Magazine, Ballard (1970, [no pagination]) comments on the demise of the future and an immersive experience of the present: 'the present is infinitely more varied and bizarre and fantastic. People have annexed the future into the present, just as they've annexed the past into the present'. With the quick obsolescence of space age technology and the rise of communication technology, people continuously retreat inwards into an inner suburbia. The suburbanization of England after the Second World War for Ballard is a retreat into the inner realm. Suburbia is a fantasy of escaping into the deep time of the unconscious and retreating into the deep recesses of the self. For Ballard, such annihilation of past/future and immersion in the present is both disastrous and liberatory. On the one hand, suburbia means psychological regression, solipsism, and annihilated time. On the other hand, in suburbia one escapes from the tyrannical rule of clock time and creates a 'temporal habitation' for oneself. Suburbia also acts as the last resort for a 'tactile existence' and 'complete involvement with [one's] own bodies' (Ballard, 1970).

In suburbia, 'we are still in the dying twilight of tomorrow, we can still see the idea of the future' (Ballard, 1970, [no pagination]). Rather than an intense new light, the future in suburbia is a dying light with subdued color and moribund tones. As I mentioned in chapter two, the time in *High-Rise* is 'dialectics (dawn and dusk) in a standstill'. Ballard's fiction that has no obvious beginning or ending, or where beginning and ending are conflated, features a twilight narrative. 'Twilight' suggests an ambivalent temporality: it is a period in between full night and sunrise or in between sunset and full night. In twilight we experience time as pure change yet the beginning and the end, the past and the future are indistinguishable from each other. As the demarcation between past and future and their sequential order collapse, twilight is also a state of suspense and expectancy; change and transformation paradoxically rest on poise and stoppage. In this chapter I will analyze the temporal forms in suburbia dramatized in what I call the 'twilight narrative' of *Vermilion Sands* (1971) and *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979). In *Vermilion Sands*, a collection of short stories published between 1956-1970, day and night alternate endlessly. The light in the stories builds up psychedelic intensity in a violent point, then dims and cedes into darkness, with the culminative energy and intensity of

modernist epiphany but without its transformative power. The duo light of the past and the future, the nascent and the moribund are entangled, haunting the present with a disruptive power yet does not quite disrupt it. Suburbia has a 'time infrastructure' of timed disruption and rhythmic arrhythmia.

I will read the temporal closure in two ways. Firstly, I contextualize these texts in the recuperation of avant-garde's aesthetics in the shift from post-war mass suburbanization to the rise of affluent gated communities. The enclosed narrative demonstrates the neo-avant-garde's vision of a new, unplanned suburbia on the peripheral is ruled by a rhythmic alteration between leisure and work, seriousness and play. The holiday resort is also a prison camp. Secondly, drawing on Marxist thinker Mark Fisher's idea of hauntology, I will read the suburban acts of gardening in these novels as ways of cultivating temporal habitation. As I've pointed out in my analysis of 'Thousand Dreams of Stellavista' in the last chapter, in suburbia, time becomes an infrastructure and editable fourth dimension. In 'dimming' the intense new light of the utopian future, the texts cast the cultural landscape as a twilight zone of obsolescence that allows us to be haunted by the glimmer of an unrealized future, in the repeated act of 'sculpting' and 'editing time'. Although the suburb of Vermilion Sands is depicted as a far-off resort, the haunted synthetic landscape with cyclic narratives mixed temporalities and discordant forms is similar to those featuring his urban trilogy set at the heart of London. All of Ballard's literary spaces, peripheral to or right in the urban centre, are in a way suburban.

The synthetic forms in the short story collection eventually coalesce into the extreme visionary unity in the novel *The Unlimited Dream Company*. The protagonist, Blake, crashes his plane into Shepperton, and in what could well be his near-death vision, reorders the nondescript suburban town into a twilight zone of transformations, transitions and transactions. In his cannibalistic and re-socializing fantasy, he takes the townspeople into his body for a collective flight. I will read Blake as a Darwinian hero and contextualize his surrealist vision in a wider intellectual shift in the nineteenth century when science infiltrates the processes of life, mind and politics. The modern being is redefined as a gardener and a sculptor of time. In urban context, Ballard's texts debunk the 'non-place' model of the suburb and lay bare the bourgeois cultural conventions and patterns behind what is perceived as an empty,

homogeneous place. This insight orients us to alternative ways of making diverse suburban communities.

1. *Vermilion Sands* **– Hauntological Return of the Past**

The post-WWII mass movement into suburban areas, according to American historian Lewis Mumford (1961) is an escape and flight into encapsulated lives. In the rise of suburban living in the U.S., also termed 'the white flight', suburbia is colonized as a site to replicate bourgeois lifestyles. Mumford in his influential work traces the mass exodus to suburbia in the history of urban industrialization. Enabled by rapid locomotion, suburbia is as expansive, insular, and obsessed with speed and empty space as motorways and high-rises (Mumford,1961, p510). Suburbs are widely conceived by critics and urban theorists as places of homogeneity, boredom and strict conformity.

As these scholarships conceptualize the suburb as a 'non-place', a set of literature in cultural geography and anthropology illuminate the charm of suburban lifestyle. American sociologist Herbert Gans (2017 [1967]), noting a discrepancy between how critics disparage suburban lifestyle and how real suburbanites take pleasure in living there, conducts a two-year study of Levittown in New Jersey, a suburban development built in the mid-1950s, that counters the negative impression of suburbia as a boring place, an impression that, he holds, neither considers the residents' feelings, nor explains why the suburb appeals to the populace and keeps expanding. In his participatory observation of the Levittowners, Gans studies the origins of community, the quality of suburban life, and the democracy of politics. He observes that the sociological character of Levittown is not shaped by the planner, but by the heterogeneous mix of the residents. This finding fundamentally undercuts the image of an atomized, bored suburban resident reinforced by literary and social critics. The suburb is not a place where inhabitants are alienated in prison cells; the form of the suburb is conducive to forms of collectivity. He also explains that the perception of a boring suburb also has to do with the lack of discursive content in home and dwelling. The enjoyment in these practices that elude speech and intellectual philosophizing lies precisely in their banal, repeatable, and ritualistic nature. It is also only through standardized, repeated appropriation of goods,

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materials, domestic objects that the dwellers can assert themselves, establish relations, and invent social laws. Within the range of repeatable acts, the residents enjoy a fair amount of freedom to recreate their own rules and relations. Gans concludes that the ineluctable 'beauty' the suburb is less about the geographical space than the desire for an autonomous life in lower density neighborhoods. Gans's apology for suburban dwelling, although not explicitly celebratory, has a futuristic, if not utopian, ring to it. By pinpointing the charm of suburban lifestyle, he has also predicted its 'future' -- the search for lower density and autonomous neighborhoods could spread to inner-city areas. Peripherality will no longer be a prerequisite for a suburb. With the emergence of dispersed, decentralized perimeter cities and gentrification of inner-city suburbs, suburban lifestyles have become ubiquitous and discussions of them start to challenge the centre-peripheral dichotomy.

The futuristic undertone of Gans's ethnographic work is amplified in a controversial project on English countryside led by English journalist and writer Paul Barker, architecture historian Reyner Banham, urban geographer Peter Hall and architect Cedric Price. Inspired by Gans, they have collaborated to create an unplanned town in Britain between 1967-69 and published 'Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom' in 1969. Benham, the author of *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971), despises the central planning in older cities and champions the American West as a land of spontaneity and vitality. Together they each take a British countryside and imagined its sprawl based on LA and its freeway system, an epitome of freedom. The purpose of the project is to adopt a socio-anthropological approach in place of aesthetics and the mode of planning from above. Rebelling against central planning, spontaneity and inhabitant participation are incorporated into urban design. There is a sense of uncertainty in undeveloped spaces, and a constant dissolution of existent forms. The authors hold that suburbs should not be planned, as the monitoring would never keep up with the ad hoc way that people use space. Barker (1969, p436) suggests 'non-planning' as an alternative approach to 'find out what people truly want', 'discover the hidden style of mid-20C Britain' and 'work out what sort of place Britain really was and might become'. In a time when suburbia

was only peripheral and affiliated to urban centres, both Gans and Barker took it as a social laboratory and saw its potential to envision a future not yet in concrete shape.

Notably, the non-plan project's anti-elitist, anti-art, anti-planning sensibility and the call for the direct, unimpeded expression of the unconscious will of the masses suppressed by conscious, prescribed ways of living has an avant-garde ring. Precisely because of the apparent indistinctness and lack of aesthetic appeal, suburbia has become an ideal place to imagine a freer, less confining and democratic future. 'Sub' suggests more than geographical location, but also the unfinalized and unexplored facets of life. Different from Gans's realistic account of suburban life and Barker's romanticized account of suburban freedom, Ballard sees the suburb as a solipsistic inner zone that gives free rein to one's lurid dreams and devious pleasures. Ballard's fictional suburbia, Vermilion Sands, is a neutral zone where a set of contradictory terms converge: the outer space and the inner space, freedom and order, nature and culture, work and play. In the preface to *Vermilion Sands*, Ballad writes:

> Vermilion Sands is a place where I would be happy to live. I once described this overlit desert resort as an exotic suburb of my mind..... the suburbs are at last coming into their own. The skies are larger, the air more generous, the clock less urgent [..] Vermilion Sands has more than its full share of dreams and illusions, fears and fantasies, but the frame for them is less confining. I like to think, too, that it celebrates the neglected virtues of the glossy, lurid and bizarre.

> … where each summer Europe lies on its back in the sun. That posture, of course, is the hall-mark of Vermilion Sands and I hope, of the future – not merely that no-one has to work, but that work is the ultimate play and play the ultimate work. … I wait optimistically for it to take concrete shape around me. (Ballard, 2001[1971], pp7-8).

Vermilion sands is a synthetic landscape where the organic and inorganic, natural and mechanical, mythical and modern forms coalesce. It is also a big garden, occupied by hybrid, mutating forms: singing plants, sonic sculptures, screens, fabrics, and houses that respond to human emotions. The fantastic beach resort of Vermilion Sands, according to Ballard, is modelled on the desert resort cities in southern California. The happy, optimistic tone is instantly neutralized when the fictional resort as described as a product of the mind, as if the future is but an illusion, a fantasy, and an empty 'posture'. Echoing Levittown and the English countryside, the fantastic suburbia of Vermilion Sands is a desert where civil order is

less fixed and is autonomously coming into its own shape. Once suburbs come into their own, they have the tendency to spread to 'the northern shores of the Mediterranean' (7). While 'overlit' suggests a strong, intense light, a hope for a future that allows for unimpeded expression of desires, it also generates an excess of entertainment and physical pleasure. Overexposed to sunlight, the body develops a condition of lethargy. 'Nothing in Vermilion Sands ever changes' (143), as remarked in one of the short stories, 'Say Goodbye to the Wind'. The characters suffer from 'beach fatigue, that chronic malaise which exiles the victim to a limbo of endless sunbathing, dark glasses and afternoon terraces' (209). In Ballard's archaeologist look, 'the unique and self-contained future' in suburbia eventually concretizes into a banal, ubiquitous sunbathing posture. The boredom and fatigue of leisure society and consumer culture is a 'future' where play and work are indistinguishable. The past and the future are titillating yet unreachable in the endless play and recreation in the present. *Vermilion Sands* has anticipated how Gans's and Barker's ideal oscillates towards exactly what it seeks to subvert: the search for motion, flux, change terminates in a lethargic posture; the play supersedes work and becomes ultimate work; the rebellion against aesthetics generates a new kind of aesthetics – 'the glossy, lurid and bizarre'. The book invites a backward look at the future obsolescence of these experimental zones and their operation under a tyrannical form of time – a rhythmic alteration between work and play, unfamiliarity and familiarity, shock and boredom. Time is sculpted into a rhythmic form; the residents find temporal habitation in the periodical return of the past.

Vermilion Sands is also a landscape that witnesses the bankruptcy of modernism's utopian dreams. One can certainly identify some modernist as well as romantic themes in the stories, but with a twist. Distant music hovers in the background and the skylight is faintly illuminating. Romantic tropes - the cloud, sand, wind, flying, cloud-sculpturing, ray-hunting, cruising, dancing all give the place mobility, vibrancy, shifty contour and a sense of precariousness and impermanence. Nature's rejuvenating power amends instrumental reality. The modernist heroes on self-exile become idle middle-class professionals and fugitive film celebrities making their intermittent appearances. Using clouds, sonic cores, poetry writing machines, photosensitive

paints and modular fabric, they create eccentric self-portraits that are juxtapositions of disjointed parts, mixing natural elements with industrial wastes of concrete and metal. These grotesque assemblages and half-automated creatures are also travesties of a dark, unspeakable past of the characters. In an 'epiphanic' moment, a dark past is revealed, and they go through a counterproductive metamorphosis like 'an over-ripe fruit that plays itself out' (120). They bisect like a cocoon, shred into pieces, or topple themselves over, leaving a heap of ruins. In a torn piece of garment or a deformed house, the traumatic site is shaped like extricated wounds and tortured flowers. Confused and fascinated by these unreadable geometries and topographies, the characters choose to remain on the traumatic site to repeat the cathartic process. The place experiences temporal and narrative closure. The nine stories form a cubist structure repeating the same plot and juggling around the same set of characters. Each story starts with a self-reflective moment in the aftermath of a traumatic event and ends with an anticipation of its future repetition. The narrative has the highpoint and overlit intensity of modernist epiphany but is devoid of its transformative power.

Suburban gardening and tuning the wild

Considering these stories occupy a peculiar moment in between modernism and postmodernism and being crudely historicist, we may say they dramatize the weary, post-utopia landscape after the second world war, and anticipate a fully-fledged consumer and leisure society of late capitalism. Modernism's grand aesthetic and political projects to invent new forms for the effervescence of modern life leaves a landscape of disfigurement, deformation and disorder with no clear orientation. The epiphanic disruption and new aesthetic form that modernism envisioned for the future has become the mould for the replicable patterns of a more leisurely bourgeois lifestyle. As I argued in chapter two, in the disillusionment with modernism's technological future, the postmodern turn towards openness, uncertainty and brokenness has paved way for a more agile, flexible neoliberal network of immaterial labour. Suburbia is used as a test site and an incubatory lab for the transition from state capitalism to post-Fordism in the 80s, which draws on avant-garde as well as romantic themes of mobility and flight.

Through 'Prima Belladonna' and 'Venus Smiles', I read the twilight narrative in a utopian/dystopian framework. In the two stories, the suburbanite is a gardener trapped in a cyclic time. In 'Prima Belladonna', the narrator, Steve, spending most of his time on his balcony drinking beer and playing I-Go game with his friends, owns a music shop where he tunes up a special plant, Khan-Arachnid orchid, to produce music records. The flower is pollinated by the Khan Arachnid spider in the Guiana Forest and genetically modified by Dr. Mendal. With a possible allusion to the genetic experiments conducted by Nazi medical doctor and anthropologist Josef Mengele, the past of Arachnid is suggestive of the dark, colonial history where suburbia acted as a utopian test site for acts of cleansing and destruction. In the story, the way Steve tunes the plant is marked by militant rigor.

> […] but as soon as I'd fed the arachnid and straightened out one or two pH gradients the rest promptly took their cues from it and dimmed down quietly in their control tanks, two-time, three-four, the multi-tones, all in perfect harmony (34).

'Two-time, three-four, the multi-tones' constitutes the regular rhythm and military precision of clock-time. Contrary to Steve's will, the arachnids refuse to merge into the harmonious scores and sing in coordination with other plants. Instead, they 'screeched and whined' and the shop plunges into a 'madhouse' (34). The orchid soon attracts a female visitor, Jane Ciracylides. Sharing the flower's hybridity and discord, Jane is of a mixed genetic background with 'a good deal of mutant in her' (31). Steve and Jane have two contrasted, gendered approaches to the flower; one is tactile and intuitive, the other is technological and instrumental. Steve detests the 'uproar' made by the arachnid and describes it in mechanical and morally disparaging terms: 'neurotic' (34), 'vicious' (35) and 'malevolent' (36); Jane 'listens' and 'stares intently' (37) at its organic parts (ribs, spines), greeting them in a 'praying' (36) gesture. Instead of imposing scores and music schemes on the flower, Jane coaxes it to sing at its own will. Soon the arachnid emits a rhythmic fusion of melody and raises the other plants in chorus.

Jane evokes and stimulates the primal energy of the flower and amplifies its cacophonous utterance and destructive potential. In a later scene, moved by her singing performance, the flowers are in 'an advanced state of rut'. To Steve's frustration, Jane's resonation with the arachnids brings about an 'audio-vegetive armageddon' (40) and causes other plants 'acute melancholia' (41). Her interaction with the flower is always accompanied by

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the light. Jane is 'golden-skinned', and has the brilliance of 'a walking galaxy of light'. As she stares intently at the flower, her skin glows aflame. The light reaches its utmost brightness in her final fusion with the orchid. In the final scene, the overstimulated flower grows three times its sizes and devours her in what resembles a copulating act. Their fusion fills the dark shop with 'a brilliant flow' and 'golden fire' (45). After the climactic act, the music and the arachnid both die away and the shop returns to darkness. After the episode, the Recess ends, and the government restores the clocks to make everyone work off the lost time.

On the one hand, Jane embodies the spectral presence of untamed, pristine desire that remains disturbing and destructive to the patriarchal order and industrial time. On the other hand, her subversion and destruction resemble a 'safety valve': after releasing the unconscious, primal, sexual energy, norm and order are restored. After her free-flowing desire is burnt out, there is a nihilist quietude and emptiness, which echoes the 'boredom, lethargy and high summer' in the beginning. Time elastically moves between acceleration and deceleration. Even the game the characters play, i-Go, is a decelerated chess. In the same way that Jane always cheats the game only because otherwise it is too boring, her tuning of the plant violates Steve's military measure and disturbs the tempo of clock time. Jane's visit threatens to subvert the schematic temporal singularity but does not quite subvert it. Jane's death is followed by her immediate revival. At the end of the story, she still makes intermittent reappearances in hearsay. Her voice, 'a spectral fountain, hanging faintly in the darkness' (45), lingers on. Listening to her siren-like voice, Steve expects her next return and waits to play another i-Go game where she will predictably cheat again. Resembling an endless game, the story repeats itself in cycles of light and darkness, chorus and discord, recess and productivity.

The flower in 'Prima Belladonna' takes a sculptural form in 'Venus Smiles'. The story begins with the narrator, Hamilton, and other members of the art committee, fretting over the problematic sculpture which has just been commissioned as a piece of public art in the town made by a female architect, Lorraine Drexel. Drexel, like Jane, has eyes like black orchids. Her sonic statue is a mixture of mechanical and organic forms:

> With its pedestal the statue was twelve feet high. Three spindly metal legs, ornamented with spikes and crosspieces, reached up from the plinth to a triangular apex. Clamped on to this was a jagged structure that at first seemed to be an old Buick radiator grille.

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[…] the whole structure of scratched chromium had a blighted look like a derelict antenna (113).

The spindly metal legs uplift the sculpture from its pedestal into space as if trying to break free from gravity. The 'derelict antenna' is another space age imagery. Collaging industrial materials and ornamental pieces, giving simple geometric forms an organic unity and the agency to move, Drexel is an artist working as a 'constructor'. Departing from the two-plane dimensions of traditional paintings, Russian constructivists use 'construction' as a method, assembling industrial materials to reach into space and participate in life. Vladimir Tatlin's 'Corner Counter-Relief' (1914), for example, is a collage of five contrasting textures suspended between two planes. The name of Drexel's piece 'Sound and Quantum: Generative Synthesis 3' possibly alludes to the constructivist method that synthesizes modern materials and activates the three-dimensional space. Mobilizing corners and edges, the art piece encourages the viewers to participate in the complexity of the spatial composition. Like the arachnids, the sonic sculpture's 'babel of symphonic music' (118) is 'deliberately designed to get on [the audience's] nerves' (119). The futurist sculpture is simultaneously 'infernal', 'shrouded' and 'derelict' (113). It lets out a 'high-pitched whine, a sitar-like caterwauling' in memory of Drexel's dead lover, a sitar-player. Sharing a Dadaist ethos, Drexel means to mock the townspeople's placid taste. Drexel's piece has won the favor of the art committee over the proposed projects of the two male architects – 'a hundred-feet high vibrating aluminum pylon' and 'a megalithic step-pyramid' (112). Its synthetic and nonobjective aesthetics mock the material rigidity and classicism of the male architects. Drexel's avant-garde piece wins the competition. The sculpture resembles the collaged installations and sculptures in the 1956 exhibition 'This is Tomorrow', which has taken up historical avant-garde's as-found aesthetics and constructivist methods and kickstarted the British neo-avant-garde and pop art movement.

As the macabre form and high-pitched sounds have elicited negative public reaction, the statue is removed and replanted in Hamilton's garden. In Hamilton's garden, the statue 'grows' in an uncontrollable pace. A viewer coerced into a gardener, Hamilton attends to the sculpture, cutting it to manageable proportions. The more he cuts, however, the faster it seems to grow. During the process, opposite forces of natural and mechanical, hard and tactile forces are played against each other. Its sonic cores reach up towards the sky, shoulder struts 'springing

elastically' and 'vibrating against [Hamilton's] palm' (116). Mirroring the arachnid's carnivorous overgrowth, the sculpture topples itself over as it plays a collage of music from romantic to modernist period in anachronism. The organic unfolding of the technological sculpture follows a random process of automation. The statue is 'an over-ripe fruit' that 'begin to shred off and disintegrate, playing itself out' (120). The impulse to grow is blind and unbounded. Its movement is 'corkscrew', and 'the main foci of activity were at either end'. Recalling but different from Vladmir Tatlin's 'Tatlin's Tower' (1919), also named 'Monument to the Third International', a building of industrial materials that spirals upwards from the ground, the statue is both spiraling upwards and downwards. The sculpture grows in no temporal rhythm or directional purpose.

The self-defeating process of its expansion is interlaced with alternating conditions of light: 'The statue stood out almost luminously in the darkness, booming away to itself, more and more of the sonic cores budding out in the yellow glare of the lights'. 'Shortly after midnight it began to lean and then suddenly toppled over' (119). The half-moon throws 'a thin grey light' in the garden, and the thousands of sonic cores 'gleamed in the light thrown from the window'. 'As the first light came up at a quarter to six' the statue is taken down, giving off 'a faint ripple of lost notes carried away on the steepening sunlight' (122). The thinning and steepening of sunlight and moonlight are related to the acceleration / deceleration of the sculpture's growth in an arbitrary manner. The light is both life-giving and macabre.

Unable to tame the unruly force of the sculpture, Hamilton finally manages to tear it apart and discard it. By doing so, he has fallen into Drexel's vengeful trap. The sculpture ends up recirculating in the construction of new buildings, ships, planes, and automobiles. The statue's relocation from the art space to private garden and into industrial construction recalls the avant-garde's 'art into life', especially the productivist call for 'art into production'. The statue, like Alexander Rodchenko's network of nesting circles that evokes a planet in orbit, has a structure that is mobile and collapsible. It is driven by a desire to move into the world. While the constructivists call on the participants to collaborate in making space and the future, in the story, such invitation becomes a sinister trick, trap and conspiracy.

The constructivist art forms, although failed and repressed by Stalin's regime, have spread to the Bauhaus in Germany and continues to flourish throughout Europe and Latin America. As the sonic sculpture plays itself out in a garden and gets recycled in industrial construction, the voice of the past is preserved in the present as a 'vibration'. 'The refrain was to be taken up again' (126). A refrain in a musical piece forms its structural bases and enhances a haunting effect. On the one hand, art retains its disturbing power. Drexel's disturbing voice from the past threatens to be amplified and disseminate to a wider range. On the other, the provocative message of the avant-garde now underpins and feeds back into the monotonous rhythm of the present day and forms part of its infrastructural basis and material makeup. The story ends with 'it's only just beginning. The whole world will be singing' (126). The ending is just the beginning; the beginning signals an end. The construction contains the sculpture in a stable form, and the sculpture gives the construction a vibration / reverberation, which is a disturbing dissonance on the one hand, also affords vitality, motion, pulse and rhythm on the other.

The so-called modernism's failure is also accompanied by the failure of the avant-garde art movement. Peter Bürger in 1970s announces the death of the avant-garde art in what he calls the false sublation of art and life. Art, unable to maintain its autonomy from instrumental reality, has crashed on the shore of cultural industry. In an interview with *ZG* magazine, Ballard remarks that, after the revolutionary age of the 30s and 40s, time is in general decline. Romantic and modernist aesthetics itself becomes a spectral past that keeps returning to the present. The eruptive and dark energies in the unconscious no longer emancipate but flow with a new tempo. The avant-garde cannot seem to put together a stable subject as it rebels against the alienated and fractured state of modernity. The multifold hope, from romanticism to modernism, is not entirely lost but lingers in a twilight and its faint illumination, with neither intensity nor directory or transformative power.

Suburban portraiture and disfigured travesty

The twilight narrative also supports another reading. As postmodern reality tends towards a dematerialized landscape signaled by Jean Baudrillard's Simulacra, a total ascendence of image

over reality, VS is a 'twilight zone of material obsolescence', a post-industrial landscape that still contains the tactility of outmoded materials. Its constant apocalypses and disrupted mobility also counter the streamlined circulation of commodities in a depthless, affectless realm following the machinic, instrumental order of the Spectacle, as Guy Debord indicts.

The twilight narrative describes what Marxist thinker Mark Fisher calls 'hauntology'. In his influential book *Capitalist Realism* (2009) written in the aftermath of the economic crash in 2007 to 2008, Fisher echoes Frederick Jameson and proclaims with an end-of-history sensibility that, after the dissolution of socialism, capitalism has become the only realism with no alternative. Any oppositions and critiques of the political situation are easily assimilated into the smooth flow of market economy. For Fisher, the full immersion in capitalism can only be disrupted by 'hauntological' rupture of its temporal rhythm. Fisher's notion of 'hauntology' is taken from Derrida, which refers to an ontology that is not shaped by what is present, but what is absent. Hauntology transforms the capitalist reality into a twilight zone penetrated by the light of the past and the future. In 'What is Hauntology', Fisher identifies two orientations in hauntology:

> The first refers to that which is no longer, but which remains effective as a virtuality (the traumatic 'compulsion to repeat', a fatal pattern). The second sense refers to that which (in actuality) has not yet happened, but which is already effective in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation shaping current behavior) (2013, p19).

Being detained in a hauntological state offers a glimmer of hope and the possibility to reshape reality between virtuality and actuality. The twilight signals a hauntological state of stoppage where time is no longer progressive. It also lays bare the topology of time where the images of the past and the future are superimposed on the present.

> We live in a time when the past is present, and the present is saturated with the past. Hauntology emerges as a crucial – cultural and political – alternative both to linear history and to postmodernism's permanent revival. […] When the present has given up on the future, we must listen for the relics of the future in the unactivitated potentials of the past (Fisher, 2012, pp49-53).

Fisher repeats Benjamin's backward posture as he attends to the voice of the past in the relics of history. In this reading, twilight suggests an ambiguous temporality where the hope for future is embodied in the ruins of the past. The ruinous sites still contain the utopian potential of the photographic image to destruct art's aura and pump aura out of reality. The arachnid's and sonic sculpture's metamorphosis recalls the mechanical working process of the camera in Benjamin's account, which is not unlike the organic process of a plant unfolding (Beasley-Murray, 2012). In the epiphanic mode of photographic vision, reality is blast open and unfolds like a flower, revealing its unconscious optics. Time can be sculpted and tuned like a flower. The historical and optical unconscious are stored in cacophony, anachronisms, and the enigmatic topographies of crude, formless materials. The stories mimic the way that the photograph authenticates the past by capturing the optical unconscious and its explosive, disruptive energy. The past returns in alien forms that need to be recognized again. In 'Studio 5, The Stars', the haunting music is likened to 'broken skeins of coloured tape unravelling in the sand like the threads of a dismembered web … by morning, before I swept them away, they would hang across the south face of the villa like a cerise bougainvillaea' (146). The simile links a series of travesties of the past. The past not only persistently clings to everyday materiality like parasitic vegetation, but also baffles the inhabitants with its esoteric name. The past only appears in travesties that appear strange in the context; its meaning remains unreadable. The word 'like', breaking its promise of legibility, is followed by a jargon that upsets the reader's expectation of familiarity and readability. The repeated act of 'sweeping' seems futile, yet every return of the past brings a new form that begs renewed attention and engagement. In the ceaseless variation and mutation of forms delivered by his awkward similes, we are forced to be a 'gardener' to supervise the morphing of the prosaic form.

Following Jameson, Fisher (2018, p49) criticizes postmodern pastiche's 'nostalgic mode', i.e., merely demonstrating a *formal* attachment to modernist art but canceling out their hope for the future. Evoking a past without weight or intensity, postmodern art demonstrates a

passive acceptance of 'the end of history', or the terminal temporality of postmodernity. However, Fisher argues that Ballard's science fiction is different from the postmodern science fiction that Jameson rightly criticizes. For Fisher, Ballard's work is a hauntological art that retains the disruptive force of the past. The hauntological art whose temporal disjuncture and refusal of resolution differentiates itself from postmodern pastiche. In 'Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology', Fisher (2013, p47) notes how Afrofuturist music, as an exemplification of hauntology art, highlights a 'dyschronia', a temporal disjuncture through preserving the crackle in an old recording. While postmodernity screens out the spectrality, naturalizing the uncanniness of the recording apparatus, hauntology restores the uncanniness of recording by making the recorded surface audible again…in sonic hauntology, we hear that time is out of joint. The joins are audible in the crackles, the hiss…' (Fisher, 2013, p48). The surface noise in the crackles, Fisher (2013, p49) explains, is important because it makes us aware of 'the slice of the past erupting into the present' and forces us to come to terms with 'permanence of our (dis)possession, the inevitability of dyschronia'. The dyschronia in the hauntological landscape and hauntological art is disruptive to the temporal hegemony of capitalism and revives our imagination of the future. Such art recovers a sense of the future not by projecting futurist visions, but by a lament of its irretrievable loss and thus allows it to haunt the present. Hauntological art recalls the past without glossing over its incongruence with the present, to remind the audience that the future promised to us has never arrived.

The 'twilight zone of material obsolescence', according to Rosalind Krauss (1999a, p295), also contains the hope to reinvent the medium in modern and postmodern art's 'postmedium' condition after photography destructs art's aura and brings about its 'wholesale transformation'. When obsolete materials shed off the armour of technology, they can be reused by the artist to reinvent the medium. The photoartist is no longer an innovative maker of forms in an elevated realm called Art, but a copier, akin to Lévi Strauss's bricoleur, creating new meaning through reassembling materials in a theoretical field. As Krauss argues, in the post-medium stage of art, the artist ought to reinvent the medium by giving expression to the

technological history of medium and highlight moments of *punctum* that challenge the fluidity of the diegetic space. Similarly, for Fisher, the hauntological artist gives expression to the technological and material base of medium, the dissonance creates a temporal disruption or disjuncture that can shock the listener from an immersion in capitalist rhythm. Through 'Cloud Sculpture of Coral D' and 'Cry Hope, Cry Fury', I will read the cloud sculptures and photosensitive paint as a type of photoart or postmedium art where the cloud, the fabric, the photosenstitive paint and industrial waste - can be used as artistic medium. Both short stories are about portraiture, which is analogous to gardening – the characters trim strata of their subjectivity like tuning a singing plant/sculpture. The suburbanite is a gardener, a postmedium artist collaging various media forms into fragmented self-portraits. They are also a hauntological practitioner seeking temporal habitation by sculpting time. The formless assemblage that they compulsively construct and reconstructs can be seen as a 'hauntological art' where the past / unrealized future keeps returning in cacophony, crackles, and relics.

In 'Cloud Sculpture of Coral D', the cloud is used to make portraits of seahorses, unicorns, presidents and film stars. The play with natural elements (the wind, cloud, rain) temporarily alleviates boredom. Three pilot artists, Petit Manuel, Van Eyck, and Nolan, are invited to perform for the rich patron, Miss Leonora Chanel. 'Let the rich choose their materials - marble, bronze, plasma or cloud. Why not? Portraiture has always been a neglected art' (21). The cloud, a romantic trope that signifies the redemptive power of nature is situated in a cultural tradition where art serves the egoistic needs of the aristocrat. Visiting Leonora's room filled with her portraits, the narrator comments that her 'colossal narcissism seemed to have become her last refuge, the only retreat for her fugitive self in its flight from the world' (22). In the first air show, Van Eyck creates a 'pastiche Mona Lisa' and 'a picture postcard Gioconda as authentic as a plaster virgin. Its glossy finish shone in the over-bright sunlight as if enameled together out of some cosmetic foam' (16).

Nolan, on the contrary, practices a hauntological art that animates the destructive potential of the wind to deliberately disfigure Van Eyck's work. In the subsequent show he produces a macabre image of a skull which is immediately met with the audience's disgust. Always destroying and reshaping his handiwork, he is violent and provocative, 'like a matador waiting for the moment to kill' (15). Nolan's macabre work triggers Leonora's memory of her husband's portrait of her and reminds her of the loss of a past that cannot be recovered. On the performance day, while Van Eyck continues to produce portraits that are 'as smooth and lifeless as carved foam' (23), Nolan visualizes Leonora as a dead Medea, which alludes to her murder of her husband, Manuel. In Greek mythology, Medea is an enchantress goddess who has helped Jason, one of the Argonauts in his sea voyage to get the Golden Fleece. The wife of Jason and the Argonaut, she aids Jason in his search for the Golden Fleece and marries him. To revenge against Jason later betrayal, she eventually kills their children and his other bride. Like the dissonance of the sonic sculpture and singing plants, the macabre image of also contains what Fisher calls the 'slice of past erupting into the present'.

When the amorphous cloud is used to produces kitsch pictures, it is a type of photographic art that has destroyed the tradition of sculpture and testifies to art's postmedium condition. Puncturing the fluidity of the cloud sculpture, Nolan destroys Leonora's fake public persona. His evocation of a deadly as well as helpful goddess gives expression to the medium of the cloud and uncovers a dark past that is hidden and suppressed in the flattering self-portraits.

In the final performance, both Van Eyck and Manuel have failed to sculpt the cloud under the force of the whirlwind. They are unable to cope with the specificity of the cloud beyond a visual medium. The show ends with the latter's spectacular death. Nolan, who initially refuses to fly, suddenly soars into the tornado and drives it towards Leonora's villa. In the relics and scattered pieces of her portraits, the materials - peacock feathers on her dress – recover their tactility and make up her real subjectivity. 'Her face was as bruised now as the storm-cloud Manuel had tried to carve' (29). Nolan uses the wind / cloud as a medium to access Leonora's past and expose her true character. He invites a spectral past, integrates it into the composition and fissures the smooth surface of the canvas. The disfigured portraits become more alive than the originals and even supplant their existence.

In 'Cry Hope, Cry Fury', the portrait the female protagonist, Hope, is also making a hauntological art that reminds her of a future that is never arriving. Her present reality is conditioned by a traumatic past - the assumed death of her lover Charles Rademaeker, also referred to as the Dutchman, and a hope for his return. She murdered him when his portraiture reveals 'some of the unstated elements' in her character (102). Since then, she has been driving a 'spectral ship' sailing along the sand-sea in search of Rademaeker, her bedroom stocked with paintings tracing his absent presence. 'Sentinels watching for Hope's phantom mariner, they revealed in monotonous detail the contours and texture of the empty landscape' (98). Knowingly letting herself be haunted, Hope keeps looking for a replacement for her dead lover. She ends up rescuing the narrator, Robert Melville, and uses him as a 'travesty', an instrument through which Rademaeker reappears.

Melville, a reference to the author of *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville, cruises across a landscape carved by the past and disfigured by ravines and caves. His smooth mobility is entirely tangential to the verticality of the land, which is trodden on as a flat surface, and a picturesque background for his hunting business. 'Skirting a wide ravine whose ornamented mouth gaped like the door of a half-submerged cathedral, I felt the yacht slide to one side, a puncture in its starboard tyre'. Only when his mobility is interrupted that he stops and 'took stock of the landscape' (92). Like the ancient mariner who is punished for killing an albatross, Melville, after killing one of Hope's sand-rays, gets stranded in a temporal finitude – 'time seemed suspended at an unchanging noon, the sky full of mock suns' (93). He is then rescued by Hope, 'Coleridge's nightmare witch' (94) and invited to sit for photosensitive portraits with her. The photosensitive painting mirrors the way that light is imprinted on a sensitive film. The traces of the subject overlap and superimpose onto each other in a formulaic and contingent process. Over time, the kinetic canvas of the photosensitive portraits has 'recapitulated in reverse a complete phylogeny of modern art' (98). 'Phylogeny' is the study of the evolutionary history and relationships among or within groups of organisms. Modernist and avant-garde art styles are as if an organism morphing through stages. Like Greenberg's naturalized realm of modern art in Krauss's critique, the canvas acquires a life of its own:

These coalesced into the crude forms of late Picasso, in which Hope appeared as a Junoesque Madonna with massive shoulders and concrete face, […] Ultimately an impressionist period emerged, lasting a few hours, a roseate sea of powdery light in which we seemed like a placid domestic couple in the suburban bowers of Monet and Renoir (98).

The canvas becomes an abstract, automated, and continuous realm of representation, which keeps working even without the presence of the sitter. The half-automated process dramatizes the post-medium condition of modern art, as artistic traditions are freely permutated in the postmodern pastiche. In impressionist paintings, color segments, facets, and planes pulse in a tangle of colored energy. The 'roseate sea of powdery light' that encapsulates the tumultuous dynamism of modern life is supposed to provoke and energize its viewers. However, the photosensitive painting's shuffling of these color segments, forms and styles is automated and generates a 'placid', sedentary effect.

In Benjamin's (1985[1931]) account in 'A Small History of Photography', the extensive time of posing gives the subject the aura of specificity, and the documentation of the optical unconscious helps embed the sitter into the network of social relations. In the extended posing of Hope and Melville, the minute details in the background are projected onto the canvas. 'What Hope and I had not noticed was the presence of a second figure in the painting' (100), which is Hope's ex-lover, Rademaeker. The painting captures Hope's real identity by authenticating her traumatic relationship in the past. Meanwhile in Hope's bedroom, the photosensitive painting automatically and continuously composes a picture of Rademaeker and his sailing ship, which mirrors Atget's proto-surrealist photography that turns the cityscape into a collection of traces. Hope is eternally looking for her missing lover by reconstituting his traces. The photosensitive art is structured upon a lack and invites the participation of discourse and mythology. The meaning of the painting, as well as Hope's story, is never specified, but hinted at through a series of allusions to old narrative forms. Hope's past can only be inferred as the characters make a series of allusions to mythologies and literature about sea voyages – Medea, the Ancient Mariner, the Flying Dutchman (a ghost ship that legendarily never makes port), and Prospero (a Shakespearean magician who arranges vengeful shipwrecks). The past can only appear in discursive travesties.

For Hope, Rademaeker also only appears in imagery travesties. She gazes at Melville, who has a likeness to Rademaeker, 'as if waiting for some absent element in [his] character to materialize' (98). Unaware that it is the real body of Rademaeker returning and superimposing his features on Melville's portrait, Hope mistakes him for her reincarnated lover and makes him wear his old garment, a blood marked jacket with a bullet hole. Hope makes Melville her new Rademaeker; the name seems to be a playful reference to Duchamp's readymades, a found object that becomes art in a new context. In the violent climax, Rademaeker, who turns out to be a real person rather than a ghost, returns only to be shot again by Hope. Melville realizes that 'by refusing to admit the reality of her fantasies Rademaeker destroyed her' (109). As the painting is disfigured, Hope's self-portrait disintegrates, before the next one is made. Rademaeker's presence has deprived her of her loss and shattered her hope for the future. The future must not arrive, and Hope actively chooses to maintain the state of hoping. While in 'the cloud sculpture of coral D', the wild energies inherent in the materials eventually boil over and disfigure the artwork, in 'cry hope, cry fury', the conditioning power of the past (also the future) participates in the present as a lack that cannot be filled or eradicated. Stranded in a liminal state of 'hoping' and 'longing', she is willingly confined in an anticipatory posture facing both the past and the future. Hope is not simply haunted, but hauntologically awaiting the next coming of dawn.

In the repetitive stories that reshuffle the same plots characters in an endless cycle, the suburbanites are willingly entrapped in a temporal infrastructure of rhythmic arrythmia and chronic dyschronia. As the past speaks in dissonance and manifests in discordant forms and travesties that are out of place, the acts of gardening and portraiture are an endless game bounded in specific time and space that they willingly engage themselves. Their artwork is also a hauntological art that preserves the dyschronia in the relics of the past/future. The readers, equally detained in the process, are also unable to join the ecstatic march into the future. Rather, they are forced to stay and intuit the future as a faint, unreachable light, and a glimmering echo of the past. Twilight is the temporal form of the grid that allows the residents to stay both inside and outside time.

To conclude, in the dying twilight of the future, we can still see yesterday's tomorrow. This statement can mean two things. Following the utopia/dystopia framework in the first

reading, the diacrohonia and arhythmia that gives rise to modernist epiphany has become the mould for the replicable patterns of a more leisurely bourgeois lifestyle. Twilight implies a circular repetition that leads to poise, rest and imprisonment. Following the second reading,

yesterday's tomorrow means that the future is still imaginable in the unrealized potential of the past, in what is virtual and not yet. Twilight implies a restless, anticipatory motion and a hauntological experience. It creates a temporal closure as temporal habitation, a way of dwelling in time.

From Originality to Experientiality

'Take any section of it and you'll find the original motifs being repeated. Each part has all the authentic Drexel mannerisms' (117) This description of Drexel's sonic sculpture also fits *Vermilion Sands*. The text resembles an organic sculpture organized around certain motifs. Each part has all the unmistakable Ballardian mannerisms. As Roger Luckhurst argues, Ballard's repetitive motifs and characters constitute a chain that locks the reader in compulsive reading.

> Entering the Ballardian oeuvre is like entering a chain whose seriality severs any visibility of beginning or end. This is repetition understood not as secondary, copying a prior original, but as primary and instituting [...] the reader can immediately recognize, by textual elements, a Ballardian fiction but can do little to articulate its power, its core of unreadability (1997, pp3-4).

For Luckhurst, Ballard's work is populated with idioms, tautology and award similes that are unreadable and *Vermilion Sands* 'intensifies the problematic of the idiomatic trait' with nine stories repeating the same plot (2). What Luckhurst identifies as the coexistence of recognizability and unreadability comes from the mythical structure of the collection. As Krauss (1986) notes, in mythology, the sequential features of a story are rearranged spatially. It is not a copy of an original but a totalized form of art that is sustained by an enclosed serialized order. The stories revolve around one overarching doctrine. Each story is embedded in an artificial pedigree of serialized events and codified sensations. Its meaning is attached to the collective form.

The recurrent theme of flight in his fictional suburbs, Ballard (1988, [no pagination])

remarks, draws on 'a common pool of archetypal imagery' and 'represents a means of transcending one's own particular time and space and moving to a radically different realm'. Drawing on the shared imageries in the 'common' pool of human experiences, each individual can build a 'particular' and personal mythology. Vermilion Sands is a mythical site, where

time, space and objects make up a common pool of materials the residents can draw on to shape individual experience. The structure of the stories also mirrors the structure of mythology that repeats a prototypical narrative, a situated account of a temporal and causal sequence of events (Fludernik, 1996). When a disruptive event occurs in the story world, an individual has a personalized and situated experience as he/ she lives through the disruption. In other words, a prototypical story is oriented towards 'experientiality' rather than 'originality'. The structure of a religious text is also prototypical. Doctrine predates narration and repetition seeks moral consensus. The repetition confirms the commonality of experience and invites the moral positioning of the characters. Seen within a mythological structure, 'unreadability' also creates moments of stoppage for the readers and urges them to live through the disruption.

When suburbs are typically dismissed as non-zones of existential dullness, Fisher (2018) sees Ballard as one of the few poets who excavate the suburb's redemptive potential in its 'hauntological' state. As Alfie Bown (2017) remarks in the review of Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, to accept there is no alternative is a positive construct 'forcing us to move into a future that looks back on itself'. The acknowledgement of closure brings about a backward look at present, which calls our attention to 'making concrete demands for change rather than dreaming of utopian or dystopian alternatives'. Despite the tyrannical power of capitalism that smooths over ruptures, Fisher suggests that there is still a glimmer of political and economic possibility which rises not from 'outside' but within the enclosed temporal structure itself. Ballard's narrative closure also gestures at a refusal to imagine the future through seeking an exodus and outside.

The temporal closure in Ballard's hauntological art drives us to confront the experientiality in suburbs without dismissing them as dystopian non-places or utopian 'new' havens. In the urban context, the suburb is both familiar and unrecognizable with mixed potentials. Ged Pope (2015) notes a link between Ballard's work with suburban Gothic film and literature that explore the social depravity behind utopian suburbia safety and affluence. The narrative of hauntology is also a reinvention of the narrative of haunting in popular cultural form of suburban gothic. In *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture (2009),* B. M. Murphy notes that suburban gothic, a sub-genre of the American gothic tradition, features the trope of a peaceful-looking suburban house with a skeleton in the closet. For Murphy, the genre reflects the fear, anxiety and psychological damage caused by the mass suburbanization of the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s. The critical and provocative register in the genre, however, is again recuperated into cultural industry. Ballard's twilight narrative contains a 'core doubleness' that refuses reconciliation. The shock effect is canceled in its repetition of the same plot. Reading Ballard's story does not deliver us to a new aesthetic experience. Rather, its hauntological disturbance provides us with a revisionist awareness of the temporal rhythm and propels us to restart from within.

By dramatizing the process of how suburbanites create private mythologies through repeatedly drawing on a common pool of materials, the text has delineated the infrastructural basis of suburbs and thus opens them to alternative ways of improvisation. Robert Fishman (1987) laments that suburbia has been an archetypal middle-class invention and a collective improvisation of the bourgeoisie. Suburbia for Fisherman is a cultural construct and a conscious choice. Criticizing how the idea has been colonized by the middle class who transfer a whole set of urban lifestyles onto an undeveloped land, he emphasizes the agency of diverse occupants to improvise it into being. The notion of suburbia as a generic, homogenous non-place ends up concealing the constructed nature of the concept. Suburbia as a non-place veils bourgeoisie's cultural inventions and reinventions. The myth of the suburb as an empty, boring place says less about the place itself than a weakening sense of history and future that haunts the postmodern reality. Exposing its historical, infrastructural basis and game nature, the text brings into light the structural inequalities in using space and allows for alternative ways of harnessing the liberatory potential of technology in a way that does not conform to the default

capitalist reality.

The uneven soil in suburbia, as geographer Franklin Ginn notes in his research on suburban gardening, calls for careful navigation. For Ginn, the suburban garden is imbued with traces from the past and the gardener is constantly playing with heterogenous forms of materials and temporalities. Suburban gardens also incorporate toxic vestiges from neoliberal economy and ideology, but the gardener still attempts to 'work through the troubled space, and difficult sites' (2017, p17). In trying to build a haven among the unpredictable forces in the environment, the gardener is negotiating between certainty and uncertainty, stability and instability, encountering the wild in the familiar and cultivating the familiar out of the wild. Suburban wilderness is not the pristine nature uncorrupted by human intervention, but always coexists with the present with destructive and disruptive forces. The wild is not an 'estrangement and alterity'; it exists in 'relation and togetherness' (Ginn, 2017, p13) and is experienced in the domestic and the homely. The plant is a 'virtual time-space of potential being' (Ginn, 2017, p13). Not only does the gardener have to integrate the past, he / she also needs to channel it towards a possible future. Gardening is a playful act which is inherently volatile and unsafe. It calls for a gambling spirit to deal with the unpredictability of the future where the plants thrive or die. A gardener is also a courageous and strategic game player and a sculptor of time.

2. *The Unlimited Dream Company* **– the Psychedelic Vision of the Future.**

Blake before Blake before Blake

Compared to the suburbanites of *Vermilion Sands* dwelling in an apocalyptic site of the past, the suburbanites of Shepperton are more tuned to a psychedelic vision of the future. Driven by his obsession with flying, the protagonist in *The Unlimited Dream Company*, named Blake, drives a man-powered flight and crashes into the Thames River of the suburban town of Shepperton. The trope of gardening is repeated. Shepperton is compared to a 'well-tended garden', 'over-formal resort' (111), and Blake an omniscient, 'pagan gardener'. The glistening rivers, plumage of birds, 'overlit lawn', foliage of trees are all 'retouched by a psychedelic gardener with a taste for garish colours' (73). His inexhaustible semen infuses the town with the desire to copulate, procreate and transform, and turns it into a perverse Eden of festivity. In his

final vision, he absorbs the townspeople into his body in an ecstatic and abhorrent fantasy.

In the novel, the Blake hero also endlessly alternates between life and death in what I call a twilight narrative. In the opening of the novel, after Blake is rescued by the seven witnesses of his accident, he is told that he has died underwater for several minutes, and the whole novel could be a figment of his pre-death imagination. His messianic act is punctured by repeated visits to the submerged Cessna, to rescue a scorched corpse trapped in the cockpit, which could well be himself. The town as well as his body is going through cycles of death and reincarnation. The vision of future is propelled by the obligation to address a traumatic memory of the past. At the end of the novel, Blake lays back down into his crash site, 'the bone-bed of the winged creature whose place I was about to take' (233), repeating the scene in the beginning. Shepperton continues to be haunted by a compulsion to revisit the relics of the war, and to 'dream' a communal future. Blake is both alive and dead, or endlessly dying and coming back to life.

His repeated attempts to revive the landscape and enliven its inhabitants are accompanied by the chimeric light and electric glimmers of dawn (73). Coupling with the fallow deer, magpies and starlings, Blake releases 'the light waiting behind the shutter of reality' (88) and turns the town into a festive site penetrated by an over-luminous light. The next day, however, the town returns to its lethargic state drenched in strong sunlight. Light brings stagnation as well as rejuvenation. With the sun hanging like a 'forgotten spotlight', the light below the trees is 'unable to replenish itself' (55). 'Over [Blake's] head the sky brightened, bathing the placid roofs in an auroral light, transforming this suburban high street into an avenue of temples' (42). The auroral light is both brightly illuminating and darkly mythologizing. The festive town is cast in an ambiguous light, hovering between a progressive socialist vision and an atavist fantasy. The carnivalesque scenes and their transgressive energy are contained in a narrative form marked by enclosure and repetition. The narrative perpetually oscillates between stagnation and motion, sterility and life.

The novel resonates with the poetic imagination of William Blake. William Blake's register on the novel has been established. The novel is often taken as a fantasy of the return of Romanticist holism to remedy the atomization in capitalist reality. The creative power in opposites and the determination to reinvent the world, to create a new system are

unmistakably Blakean (Knowles, 2015). Noting William Blake's prophetic role for countercultural artists in the sixties, Alistair Cormack (2012) reads the novel alongside *Milton, a Poem* and sees it as a visionary rejection of capitalism, despite the difficulty to fit the fantastical text in any interpretative paradigm. Jason Whittaker (2022), on the contrary, reads the novel as an example of a more antagonistic posture in the seventies to the Blakean vision of the future via excess, as it might give birth to abhorrent pathologies. In Whittaker's reading of the novel, the protagonist has become a Satanic figure who consumes everything in his cannibalistic, homoerotic absorption, rape, and murder of others, in order to preserve his own life. For Whittaker, only when Blake starts dismembering himself in a Christ-like act does he conquer his satanic self, which mirrors the way that Milton in William Blake's *Milton a Poem* gives up his selfhood in his final revelation. Gavin Parkinson (2016), rejecting a moral reading of the novel, argues that Blake is not self-consciously good or bad, his deeds neither virtuous nor depraved. The only force at play is desire, and whatever it brings forth cannot be evaluated in ethical terms.

These readings point at different ways of reading Ballard's suburbia. Is it a surrealist realm of social critique or a dystopian version of it? Is it a neutral zone of free-flowing desire with no political agenda? These readings also pointed out how William Blake, more than any other romantic poets, has come back in the seventies to counter the rigidity of state capitalism, which, as I have argued, later transitioned to a more flexible neoliberal system. As Jennifer Michael notes in *Blake and The City* (2006), William Blake views the city as a human construct, where humans invest their labour and imagination in a piece of land. Different from his contemporary William Wordsworth who sees city and nature as opposites and favors the latter over the former, Blake views both as human artefacts. For Blake, the city is an organism that is endlessly shedding dead cells and evolving into new forms. In *Milton, a Poem*, architecture is compared to a creative workshop, and to build Jerusalem is to create a body shelter for collective humanity. His imaginative city is a 'suburbia' that reconciles the tension between nature and culture, individuality and collectivity.

Interestingly, Blake is coming back again in contemporary time to counter the very system he was evoked to envision. In her talk for a William Blake exhibition at Tate modern, contemporary artist Laura Grace Ford (2019) makes a case for Blake's urgency today. Her art and walking of the unofficial routes in London, Ford (2019, [no pagination]) claims, are dedicated to mapping a similar 'psychic infrastructure' of the city, an alternative mapping that reconnects the city with its pre-capitalist past and the post-neoliberalist future. The social malaise that William Blake's works deal with, Ford argues, is comparable to that which we confront today. For Ford, Blake's remapping of London is reactionary to its 'colonial bind', the colonial exploitation of the land and the river with a long history of spiritual nourishment to the inhabitants. Ford sees Blake's work as a kind of 'counter sorcery' in order to 'unbind, loosen and open up' what has been enclosed and privatized by the state and 'return them to the commons', and thus brings Blake in conversation with gentrification and state privatization of the city. She also notes how Blake's attack on the enlightenment concept of the stable and atomic subjectivity with imageries of flight, light, flowing energy, immanence, connectedness is pertinent to critiquing neoliberal individualism and its denial of collective forms of joy. Making an explicit reference to Mark Fisher, Ford has apparently been informed by his idea of hauntology when she describes Blake as a spectral force that haunts the contemporary moment, which she takes as a sterile landscape without a future. In light of Mark Fisher, the carnivalesque and the psychedelic vision of Blake is an aesthetic holism that remedies the mandatory individualism in neoliberalism.

In reimagining a freer social order, the avant-gardes and the political lefts draw on the emancipatory side of Blake to reimagine an alternate urban reality in current moments of crisis. One could posit Ballard's evocation of Blake in a history of sorcery with predecessors and inheritors to come. Resisting the capitalist society depicted in *Fight Club* as a world where everything is 'a copy of a copy of a copy', they continue to resuscitate a 'Blake before Blake before Blake'. Blake periodically returns to modern and contemporary times in an avant-garde posture and performs the magic of 'loosening', 'liberating' and 'opening up', which is then recuperated back into the very capitalist system they indict. He becomes a symbol of a holistic vision where borders, forms and hierarchies dissolve and disappear. The countercultural movement and contemporary psychogeography also tend to only recognize the emancipatory and democratic aspect of the mode of the carnivalesque and the psychedelic but overlooks hidden forms of totalitarianism.

In my reading of the novel's twilight narrative, I note that the suburbia of Shepperton, as the contradictory readings of Cormack and Whittaker testify to, has a 'bivalent', mythical structure that contains the contradictory forces of darkness and enlightenment. Following the utopia/dystopia framework, modernism is dead and postmodernism is vainly resuscitating a corpse. Meanwhile, if we read the psychedelic vision of the novel outside its immediate historical context and disassociate it from an anti-capitalist, avant-garde stance, we may contextualize the twilight narrative in a larger intellectual transition of an earlier origin and with ongoing consequences. Within this new context, the avant-garde art's dream of flight and departure can be seen in a different light.

A Darwinian Blake

'Dreams of flight haunted that past year' (17). The young Blake is convinced that he is a new species of winged man and harbours a vague intuition of his messiah role in the future. The spectre of the future triggers a myriad of sociopathic impulses he cannot yet make sense of. His erratic behaviors, copulating with the cricket pitch at school inspired by a dictionary of anthropology, dictating sexual fantasies into answering machines, leading a group of students off campus in a Pied Piper complex, have made his life 'an avalanche zone' (17). Despite the failure to get anywhere, he maintains the tenacious faith in himself to 'one day assemble a unique identity out of this defective jigsaw' (19). Eventually, his obsession with man-powered flight drives him to steal an airplane from London airport and crash into Shepperton. He is driven by a pathological impulse and fantasy of extreme deform and drastic departure from reality, a tendency that is manifest in Romanticism's embrace of dissolution and continues in modern art. Such departure is a preparation for a later cause that is unknown to him.

His strange impulses for departure and flight only reveal their true meaning later, as Blake leads the townspeople of Shepperton out of their atomized segregated residence into an open land to mingle with each other. The subsequent transformation of the townspeople into different animals (birds, fish and mammals), and his own metamorphosis into a vulture, whale and stag mirrors Darwin's theory of evolution proposed in *Origin of Species* (1859). In Darwin's principle of natural selection, the variation of life forms is completely random, purposeless, and unknown in its initial stages. The mutations and transformations only become 'meaningful' when certain traits prove to facilitate survival and get preserved in a later stage. Conforming to the random process of evolution and the underlying law of natural selection, Blake's stage-by-stage transformation of the life forms in Shepperton is also carried out half-consciously and

purposelessly. Spilling his sperm and giving birth to a plenitude of organisms, he generates excess and waste along the way. The townspeople evolve into different organic forms in adaptation to the water, earth, and sky, and grow organs in preparation for a later function that is not apparent in the current stage.

William Blake's seeming foreknowledge of the biogenetic law has been noted (Kreiter, 1965). Rather than tracing the relationship between William Blake and Darwin, here, I will map out an intellectual transition in Darwin's time that has set the stage for the modernist movement. In his 1909 lecture 'The Influence of Darwin on philosophy', American historian and philosopher John Dewey (1910) argues that Darwin's method has kickstarted an intellectual transition from an essentialist and teleological inquiry into first/final cause to inquiry into origins, change and conditions. For Dewey (1910), although Darwin's theory has incurred much pushback from the religious community, the real debate is not between science and theology, but between the principle of 'chance' and 'design' that guides our understanding of the phenomenon of life. In the classic notion of species that follows the design principle, Dewey (1910, p2) explains, the changes in living things are orderly, cumulative and tend in one dimension towards a '*telos*, a completed, perfected end'. In Aristotle's conception, the species, '*eidos*', is a fixed form and final cause. The change in organic forms follows a set course from germination to full realization. This paradigm, applied to the understanding of reality and individual life, always looks for order in flux. The tracing of a rational ideal force at work in and through a sensible realm is also the central principle of knowledge and logic of science. The traditional design argument, according to Dewey (1910), has always been the basis of both science and religion/morality:

> Purposefulness accounted for the intelligibility of nature and the possibility of science, while the absolute or cosmic character of this purposefulness gave sanction and worth to the moral and religious endeavors of man. Science was underpinned and morals authorized by one and the same principle, and their mutual agreement was eternally guaranteed (5).

Darwin's genetic and experimental logic, Dewey continues to argue, only seems to have challenged the design principle but has actually 'operated as a counterbalance and perhaps even strengthened the argument from design'. The random variation of special forms in

Darwin's theory, Dewey argues (1910, p5), has given a 'shock' to the traditional teleological argument of design without disrupting it. The theory of natural selection has simply added an element of chance to the sequential order of the design doctrine. Rather than deviating from the developmental logic, it still looks for a deeper purpose in chance events. Drawing an analogy with surrealism's shock-effect that introduces chance into the streamlined, sequential order of life, we may say that Darwin's theory takes a 'time-out' from life's journey to telos. With a sleigh of hands, Darwin brings about a shift in our cognitive apparatus: the view of the final cause is blocked; our look is turned inwards to processuality and backwards to Origin and genealogy. As Dewey argues, by combining 'origin' and 'species', Darwin's new logic has fundamentally subverted the tendency to treat the fixed / the final as reality and origin / change as unreality. In other words, the Darwinian logic is marked by an investment in the liminal, in-between, transitionary stage in life forms.

'The exact bearings upon philosophy of the new logical outlook,' Dewey (1910, p4) argues, are 'uncertain and inchoate. We live in the twilight of intellectual transition'. To stretch Dewey's metaphor, we may use the twilight zone to represent the form of time and space in the Darwinian logic. In twilight, time is experienced as 'pure' change; only changeability is 'authentic'. Time becomes incrementally progressive and revelation/meaning/ethical value comes in installments. Predicting the long-lasting effects of the Darwin's paradigm change, Dewey argues that Darwin's theory has freed the scientific method in its application to the realm of life, mind and politics:

> But prior to Darwin the impact of the new scientific method upon life, mind, and politics, had been arrested, because between these ideal or moral interests and the inorganic world intervened the kingdom of plants and animals. The gates of the garden of life were barred to the new ideas; and only through this garden was there access to mind and politics (1910, p4).

As Darwin's theory has freed the realm of mind and politics to the intervention and investigation of the scientific method, Marx's dialectical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis have followed the principle of transition and illuminated the process of history and the mind/psyche. As Arthur Caplan and Bruce Jennings (1984) argue, Darwin, Marx and Freud together have laid bare the biological, sociological, and psychological components of

human nature and experience in conditional, developmental terms. Questions of being are displaced by questions of becoming; genealogy replaced teleological and essentialist methods.

Darwin's impact on the intellectual temper, Dewey (1910, p6) concludes, are shifts from the inquiry into the first/final cause to a study of the processes and transitions, conditions and consequences, and very importantly, in the realm of ethics, 'shifts from an ultimate goal of good to the direct increments of justice and happiness that intelligent administration of existent conditions may beget and that present carelessness or stupidity will destroy or forego'. Celebrating the positive potential in this shift, Dewey holds that the new logic 'introduces responsibility into the intellectual life' which previously has been placed on the shoulder of the 'transcendent cause'. As philosophy turns from metaphysics to a meticulous monitoring of the specific conditions and consequences of life, it can become what Dewey (1910, p7) calls 'a method of locating and interpreting the more serious of the conflicts that occur in life, and a method of projecting ways for dealing with them: moral and political diagnosis and prognosis'. The moral philosopher no longer judges, only diagnoses.

The moral philosopher turns from metaphysics to a scientist on safari. He practices what can be called a phenomenological vanguardism that keeps track of the transition and transformation of life but shies away from its ultimate meaning (destination). He can be a biologist attending to a plant and keeping a close eye on its variations and adaptations, for good or bad, or a psychoanalyst investigating the unconscious processes and life/death drives behind conscious linguistic fragments, or a Marxist historian blasting open the continuum of history and enlightening its material conditions. In this historical context, the avant-garde art movement or political vanguardism, which largely draws on Marxism and psychoanalysis, can be seen as a continued endeavor to bring the new scientific method to infiltrate realms of life, mind, politics, art, and ethics, and in doing so destabilize the border between these realms. In boiling down art to spatial constructs and mechanical operations, the modernist grid carries the artist's 'moral responsibility' to monitor and administrate the processual, existent conditions of life.

As Rosalind Krauss (1986) argues, the modernist grid has an earlier origin in visual art tradition and needs to be accounted for 'etiologically' rather than 'historically' (Krauss, 1986, p22). Etiology, the study of conditions and causes of diseases, is set against the historical. Here

it is worth specifying that by 'historical' Krauss means something close to the traditional design-based view of life, art and reality, where change is perceived as cumulative and inevitable. She is also probably referring to Greenberg's notion of modern art as a flat field in continuous flux, which implies a teleological view of art's development like an organism.

The intellectual transition I have been sketching out can be seen as a rebellion against a primary order, a streamlined, continuous unfolding that follows a predetermined formal principle. The countercultural movement's critique of the Spectacle and the instrumental logic of capitalism in the twilight zone of the seventies, as well as Fisher's and Ford's critique of the temporal finitude of neoliberalism, is a rebellion against the naturalized, streamlined course of life that preempts the possibility of change and thus suffocates political and moral freedom.

The suburbia of Shepperton is such a garden of life. Blake, the 'psychedelic gardener of life', is a Darwinian hero. His messianic transformation of Shepperton's visual, ethical, socio-historical and geographical landscape adopts the Darwinian method and teases out its aftermaths. Or rather, he impersonates a half-conscious 'God' in Darwin's logical outlook. Blake does not shape Shepperton once and for all but sets in motion a process of special transformation with only a vague intuition of his purpose. Before eventually uniting the plenitude of species in one coherent form, he is both following a distant cosmic calling and an analytic impulse: 'I had a tenacious faith in myself, a messiah as yet without a message who would one day assemble a unique identity out of this defective jigsaw' (19). The religious faith converges with the intellectual rigor to work out a geometrical problem.

In his submerged view of Shepperton as his plane crashes into the Thames, the town appears in front of him as 'an enormous, illuminated painting' (23). The painterly quality of suburbia echoes the pictorial mode of Romanticism and the spectacular mode of surrealism. The amusement pier, hotels, and Tudor mansions by the marina and the painting of a small Ferris wheel allude to the leisurely suburban lifestyle and the festival of Britain that project a new future in the visual, sensuous, piecemealed experiences. After he is rescued by doctor Miriam, he attempts to escape the place. Initially seeing 'little more than a supermarket and shopping mall, a multi-storey car park and filling station', Blake takes the town as 'the everywhere of suburbia, the paradigm of nowhere' (42). The nondescript town is 'unknown to its residents' (48). The townspeople are described as 'dream-filled marine animals' in a non-

living state where time is suspended. His mind draws a 'strict perimeter' of the motorway and the Thames, the enclosed town starts to come alive as a collective of vibrant forms. Like God's spirit hovering on water, Blake's foot-mapping of the town enlivens and animates the terrain. Water 'sparkle flintily' (47) in small swimming pools, reservoirs, and domesticated tanks. His movement brings a rejuvenating undercurrent to the barren landscape, symbolizing a unified spiritual force that rules over natural elements. Yet he remains a half-conscious messiah. 'Moving but immobile' (54), he is a confused *flaneur*, like Maitland, unable to decide whether to escape or stay in Shepperton. The 'uneven soil' (47) deranges his sense of direction. 'A whorl of minerals' encircles him. 'The high embankments of the reservoirs formed a series of raised horizons' (47). 'Raised horizon' points to two directions: it denotes both a blocked vision and a heightened visibility of a world beyond. A Jesus lost in the desert, Blake is subjected to his environment, his body turning an open vessel receptive to the 'unseen forces' (75) of the future. Like the post-Darwinian moral philosopher, he is a compulsive reader of ever-changing forms in his environment, eager to work out its complex geometry and waiting for an order to emerge from chaos.

Blake's vision also follows both a spiritual and scientific course. His *modus operandi* mixes the religious mode of revelation with scientific mode of knowledge. In one excursion back to his crash site on a small dinghy, the water examined under sunlight is broken into 'particles, hydra and amoeboid forms', and he is gripped by a desire to jump into the pool 'where life itself was born from this colloquy of dust' (59). The landscape around him disintegrates into a maze and new trajectories crisscross and layer upon each other. The concrete ramp of the car park becomes 'labyrinth of canted floors' (157). In a de-identifying process that breaks organic form into modular parts, reminiscent of the cubist art, he distills unchanging formal principles from natural appearances and sensual experiences of the world. In his metamorphosis, he is also a scientist on safari, developing organs of knowledge as he delves into the transitional processes of nature. Swimming as a whale in the water, he 'stitched the air and water into a table-lace of foam' (92). The earth, sky and water are turned into a collaborative text without a final message.

Visiting Father Wingate in the church, Blake is given a bone of a primitive flying fish found at the spot of his fatal crash. The bone, reverting to its mineral origins, is seen as Blake's 'winged forbear' (84) who goes through geological time to 'reach [their] rendezvous on this specimen table' (84). The plane - the emblem of modernity and a symbol of romanticism and modernism's dreams of flight– has become a body part evolving from the forelimb of a flying fish. The death of the war pilot, otherwise senseless, is given an evolutionary purpose and a seat in the archaeological journey of humanity. Father Wingate's painting of Blake's crash reconstructs the pilot's anatomy as 'part man, part fish and part bird' (86). Hereby the *telos* of religion, art, life, and science meet and converge at the same end point.

In an aerial marriage with doctor Miriam, Blake takes the 'shy wife of a gymnastic prodigy' (155) into his body and weds her in a flight above the dazed crowd. Dressed in the flying suit, he reads the names of the dead of the two world wars, wishing to revive them and invite them to the carnival (147). As Miriam's blood pours into his body, her wedding gown transforms into the wing of the Cessna. Blake's body is the 'doorway' into 'a realm ruled by a different time and space' (156). As Miriam dissolves into his body, 'our vision blurred, multiple images seen by the faceted eyes of this chimerized being' (159). The emancipatory dissolution of forms keeps shaping new portals, rendezvous sites and chimerized beings. In his final vision, Blake claims: 'I felt myself dissolve within these assembling and separating forms, beating together with a single pulse, the infinitely chambered heart of the great bird of which we were all part' (232). His act eventually brings the diverse organic forms through the same formal changes and ceremonial rites and unite them into the singular form of his own body. This process dramatically replays the Darwinian evolution theory and folds it back to the classic notion of *eidos* that it seems to depart from.

Blake's subversion of social relations also creates an enclosed system of transactions. As the enormous banyan tree blocks all traffic and delays the daily journey to London, people come together on the street, their work routine and domestic obligations suspended, and engage in play and creativity. Mirroring the unplanned routes of psychogeography, the re-socialized space marks a time-out from the work rhythm and deviates from its orientation towards London. Shepperton turns inward towards a carnivalesque stage; the linear form of clock time shifts to endless intermissions. Like the residents in *High-Rise* who make heaps of furniture as fortresses to survive, people in Shepperton decorate stacked washing machines with flowers and bird feathers. Their social identities dissolve and bodies mingle in a euphoric fuse. Couples exchange partners and 'people wandered in and out of one another's homes' (179). Blake transforms Shepperton into a 'carnivalesque' town, marked by the suspension of normative reality, the collapse of hierarchies and formalities, and the inversion of dualistic views of the sacred and profane, the high and low. The mode of the carnivalesque, however, relies on a bounded sphere and a fragmented timeframe in which action is evaluated. Social relations, connections and bonds are instantaneous rather than permanent. As the hierarchies and social mores are dismantled, social relations are reorganized around a totalized system of gift exchange. Dismantling the boundaries of private properties and possessions, the townspeople engage in a festival of gift-giving. Shop managers give out goods to passers-by. People exchange money and credit cards for Blake's obscene miracles that give birth to birds and flowers.

> All around me people were suddenly giving each other money, [...] Beside me a young gypsy with a grubby infant in her arms opened her purse and took out a single pound note. She pushed it shyly into my palm, smuggling a secret message to an unknown lover. Charmed by her, and eager to give her something in return, I rubbed the note between my semen-tacky hands and passed it to her son, who thoughtfully unwrapped it to reveal a tiny humming bird that hovered in a scarlet blur an inch from his nose (148).

The exchange between Blake and the gypsy in the form of gifts follows affective ('shyly', 'charmed', 'eager', 'thoughtful') rather than mathematical principles. Blake's ritualistic gift giving system establishes what French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1990 [1925]) calls a totalized system of reciprocity in gift-giving society. In his study of a North American tribe in Potlatch, Mauss describes a total social phenomenon where gift giving infiltrates all aspects of life, economics, law, religion and moraility. The power of the gift to hold its recipient to a sense of obligation comes from the totality of the system. Driven by the love of honour and fear of obloquy, people strive to give gifts more valuable than what they receive. The gift giving practice is bounded by an emotional infrastructure and competitive mechanism. Unlike market economy where goods are automatically distributed in an invisible network, the exchange of gifts is within public scrutiny and in complete knowledge of each individual. 'The gift is given in a context of public drama, with nothing secret about them' (Douglas, 1990, xviii). The gift economy sanctions both morals and intelligibility. It incorporates religious sentiments as well as rational calculation. Sacrificial ceremonies also oblige man and god in a system of reciprocity, where gifts are used to appease spiritual forces.

Mary Douglas (1990), in her foreword for Mauss's work, takes his theory of the gift rather simplistically as an 'organized onslaught' on the embedded utilitarianism in contemporary political theory. For Douglas, Mauss's look at the pre-market society of gift meant to recover the sociality that was undermined in the unfettered individualism in his time. Douglas's political reading of Mauss, similar to Ford's evocation of Blake, aims at instigating capitalism's alienation and the instrumentality of market economy. In the conclusion of her foreword, Douglas (1990, xxi) argues for the urgency of catching the 'sparks' of Mauss's idea to envision a future of the contemporary political landscape that moves beyond neoliberalism. Mauss's own description of the gift spirit is more ambiguous than what Douglas makes of it. For Mauss, there is a what comes close to a 'hauntological' existence of gift in market economy:

Things sold still have a soul. They are still followed around by their former owner, and they follow him also. [...] The themes of the gift, the freedom and the obligation inherent in the gift, of generosity and self-interest that are linked in giving, are reappearing in French society, as a dominant motif too long forgotten (84-87).

The 'spark' of the gift spirit in modern society is a 'spectral light', both illuminating and darkening. The remnants of gift economy in modern society are not simply and gloriously anti-utilitarian. The paired concepts – freedom and obligation, generosity, and self-interest – suggest that freedom and unfreedom, morality and utility are intertwined in the gift society. While the impersonal, machinic rule of exchange in capitalist market economy has becomes a second 'transcendental cause' that preempts the possibility of moral activity, in gift economy one can still exercise a 'moral freedom' and bring the full range of human qualities, impulses, emotions and imagination, desirable and undesirable, to bear upon the act of transaction. Gift economy urges us to be entrusted and obligated to each other, and to be 'freely unfree'.

The gift giving that completes the total cycle of exchange in Potlatch and religious communities, here also completes the unity of Blake's marvelous empire where he takes the townspeople into his body: 'I felt proud that they were prepared to entrust all the burgeoning possibilities of their lives to me' (115). The act is an extreme form of gift giving as 'free obligation'. As each townsfolk gives Blake strength (physical strength and mental strength in faith), Blake in return brings into being archaic animals and tropical vegetation with his inexhaustible semen.

The idea of political community as coordinated motion based on the freedom-obligation structure of the gift is also spelled out in the 17th century political thinker Thomas Hobbes's philosophy. In the beginning of his famous book *Leviathan* (2017[1651], p121), he makes a moral diagnosis of the human nature –a state of eternal war where man's life remains 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short' and uses it as the basis of his political prognosis: men discover by reason that they need to live in a commonwealth. After establishing a 'covenant of every man with every man', power is then transferred to an absolute sovereignty a 'gift' (Hobbes, 2017, p107), which is a voluntary act conducted out of free will. Once the gift is given, there is no taking it back. 'This is the Generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that Mortall God, to which wee owe under the Immortall God, our peace and defence' (Hobbes, 2017, p140). Leviathan is 'a reall Unitie of them all, in one and the same

Person'. Its power overrides all men and cannot be revoked.

Hobbes's theory applies a quasi-Darwinian approach to politics: rather than resorting to a transcendental cause to account for political affairs, he expounds the secular conditions, origins, and processes behind the need for absolute sovereignty. Transcendental virtues such as 'Justice', 'Gratitude', 'Modesty', 'Equity', 'Mercy' are reinterpreted as science of natural laws and 'the true and onely Moral Philosophy' (Hobbes, 2017, p150). Like Dewey's 'moral philosopher', Hobbes is only concerned with the specific conditions in which these values occur and the specific consequences they cause. As Dewey acknowledges, Darwin's discovery would have been impossible without the scientific revolution in the 16th and 17th century. One may trace in Hobbes's theory as an earlier example of science's march into the realm of mind and politics. Hobbes applies Galileo's model of inertial motion to the world of human action and emotion. Freedom or liberty in the state of nature, for Hobbes (2017, p295), is the 'absence of opposition' or 'externall Impediments of motion'. As men discover the laws of nature and co-found a commonwealth, their unimpeded motions are coordinated into coordinated pathways towards a shared course of action. In the commonwealth, motion coexists with impediments, and thus liberty is consistent with fear and obligation. 'Hobbesian men move endlessly, restlessly, insatiably, colliding into each other' (Gavre and Spragens, 1976, p252). Hobbes's theory is an equivalent of the law of inertia in the human world. His political community is the prototype of Ballard's gated communities shaped by the motorway infrastructure where friction coexists with mobility.

Hobbes's political state preserves the spirit of the gift. The undesirable conditions of men are also preserved and balanced in a totalized system of reciprocity and obligation. The destabilizing fear men hold for each other is almost 'sculpted' and stabilized into a communal fear for a higher power. Leviathan is an earthly god that unites men's religious endeavor and secular calculations. Hobbes's theory of sovereignty, in debunking the God-given right of the king, looks like it has betrayed theology in favor of the scientific discoveries at his age but has in fact recuperated both and thus ambiguously hovers between democracy and authoritarianism. Carl Schmitt (2007[1932], p58) in his *The Concept of the Political* suggests Hobbes's political theory is based on 'anthropological distinction of good and evil'. Men's evil nature (original sin) necessitates the existence of absolute sovereignty (God). Amplifying the

theological construct of political theory, Schmitt relates the political to a state of emergency in a miraculous, apocalyptic moment analogous to God's self-revelation. A sovereign dictator, acting in the interstices between two periods of positive constitutional order, must break his own law and homogenize the community by appeal to a clear friend-enemy distinction (Schmitt, 2007, p46–8). The spectral light of the gift becomes visible in apocalyptic moments when a deity is revealed to what can be called an 'infrastructural community'.

The chimeric union dreamt up by Blake is more than an echo to the socialist future envisioned in the midcentury but dates far back. In Blake's transformation of the townspeople, he revives the 'gift' spirit embedded in the formation of society and civil order. Echoing Hobbes's motion-based view of human action and emotion and drawing out its bright and dark consequences, Blake's union with the townspeople are also constantly framed with terms of mobility. As the townspeople climb into the 'aerial train' (165) of his body, he takes them on a flight away from Shepperton. Blake's body also turns into a 'miniature runway', which coordinates all life activities into one course and direction. The town is turned into a 'life engine' (176) as well as a killing machine. The Leviathan-Blake is 'a mesmerist moving though a sleeping audience' (168) in 'enchanted wakefulness', and a 'demented rollercoaster driver' moving towards an uncontrollable direction. 'A thousand needs and loyalties formed an immense embankment around which we sped in an invisible circle' (169). The psychedelic gardener / pagan god moving through a sleeping audience in circular mobility reoccurs in *Kingdom Come*, which explicitly uses Schmitt's political terms. The 'spirit' of the gift travels from the tribal Potlatch, lingers in Hobbes's modern sovereign state, and finds its dark afterlife in the fascist state of Nazi Germany as well as Ballard's post-millennium consumer empire.

Preceding the circular mobility described in *Kingdom Come*, which I will analyze in detail in the next chapter, the friction and inertia within Blake's body usher him onto a circular course back to Shepperton. Frustrated by the lack of control, he foregoes the love and care for his people and only keeps a sense of obligation. The flight towards the sun turns into night-flying. Luring one youth into 'the chromium dark' (181), Blake absorbs his body in a much more violent manner: 'the shafts of his bones forming splints around my femurs…his sex melted and dissolved upon my penis' (182). The boy's body is broken into particles and remodeled around Blakes body. His bodily fluids charge and dash in the 'arcades' and 'causeways' (182) of Blake's limousine-body. Blake has 'chimerized' himself, allowing 'a multiple of all these creatures' to pass through the gateway of his body 'to the realm above'. He becomes the mercurial god of passage, transition, and mediation. Embodying the 'concourse of chimeric beings', he presides over the town 'celebrating the last marriage of the animate and inanimate, of the living and the dead' (233). The final vision is reminiscent of an iconic epiphanic moment in modernist literature. Counter to the snow that falls on 'the living and the dead' in James Joyce's 'The Dead' (1914), Blake's flight unifies them in an ascending motion. The final vision, where all bodies merge into one, is both a primal fantasy and a socialist future, both the urban future and the idyllic past. The singular body ambiguously points at both an authoritarian state and a republic.

Ballard charts the expanding twilight zone, where the method of science converges with life, mind, and politics. The Darwinian god gives birth not to perfect, fixed forms unfolding teleologically according to design. The set course of life breaks into grids, structures, systems, bounded spheres of coordinated motion. In a different time and space, life forms and social relations are organized around processes. The key action becomes transition, transformation and transaction driven by a sense of free obligation. Such processuality leads to a circular motion in a totalized system. 'Vice in this world was a metaphor for virtue in the next'. The ethical meaning of an action circulates in a relativist network of substitutional metaphors.

In the twilight narrative of *The Unlimited Dream Company*, Blake's futurist vision of the suburban town of Shepperton captures the ghostly spark of archaic forms of sociality and men's brutish nature in modern society. The alternation between night and day, light and darkness dramatizes the double tendencies in Darwin's principle of transition. The twilight zone of suburbia, where intellectual endeavors gradually shift from object to process, has mixed hope and danger. On the one hand, the break away from the progressive narrative allows one to delve into the minutiae of experiences in the 'inner space'. Everyday life is enlivened by aesthetic richness. On the other hand, the carnivalesque mode of collage, deformation and variation has a reductive and totalizing tendency. Formal dissolution paves way for monolithic unity. Cut off from a foreseeable end goal, and structured around randomness, change, and contingency, human emotion and action tend towards ethical relativism. The shift from originality to experientiality and from object to process also shape authority: it evokes moral positioning and identification with an invisible doctrine / power.

'It takes the rashness of a prophet and the stubbornness of a partisan' to chart the twilight zone left by Darwin, Dewey (1910) claims. From the twilight zone of suburbia, where oppositional forces of reason and emotion, science and art wait to synthesize, prophets and partisans emerge. Ballard is undoubtedly both. As the quasi-religious text of *Vermilion Sands* enclose the readers in a Ballardian universe, Simon Sellars, an editor of Ballard's interviews describes him as 'the second sun'. The 'seer of Shepperton' conflates with his Blake hero. The luminous, prophetic Ballard is also a partisan. The acclaimed 'visual' imagination is also achieved through meticulously calculated prose and strict authorial control. In 'God-man', a newspaper review of *The Unlimited Dream Company*, Francis King (1979, p27) notes that the text features a rich use of language and imagery in microscopic detail and pins down its style as 'opulence under strict control'. What appears to be a spontaneous spillover of visual opulence and sexual energy is governed by a tyrannical rhythm.

The garden of Shepperton prefigures the more tyrannical and violent forms of gated communities in his later detective fictions. The motif of twilight continues in the narrative tropes of the noir. The prophet-partisan suburban hero has invented a new form of political action marked by circular mobility, which I will talk about in the next chapter.

Chapter Four - Suburbia and Community in *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come*

1. **Infrastructural Community**

Unlike Augé who perceives 'non-places' as alienating and unable to generate social relations, Ballard traces the gradual rise of a new form of sociality around mobility infrastructures, after traditional community seems to be lost in decentred metropolis and transient airport culture. Ballard's work depicts the typical English (sub)urban landscape, what he calls the M25 of England. The M25, a motorway built in 1975 that encircles most of Greater London, emblemizes how the (sub)urban landscape is expanding on one hand and bounded on the other. It affords unity, order, and totality to the movement of masses which are sporadic, chaotic, and contingent. Put in formal terms, the typical urban morphology as Ballard maps it has two dominant features: enclosure and connectivity.

Suburbs and suburban enclaves continue to take concrete shapes following this 'bivalent' structure. Compared to the post-war suburbs on urban fringes, the globalized suburbs from 1980-2010 are more dispersed in various urban locations. The expansive mobility infrastructures largely contributed to the shift from a centroperipheral model to a seemingly centreless, fragmented model that focuses on edges and frontiers. Ballard's quartet of crime fictions published from 1996-2006 depict 'the shifting physical and psychological landscapes of post-war Europe' (Baxter, 2008b, p94) when the federalist Europe is turning into a superstate in global capitalism. *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000) are set in expatriate elite residential compounds, a holiday resort in Spain and a business park in France, with an underbelly of ritualized rape and vandalization. *Cocaine Nights* is set in Gibraltar, a space in-between British and Spanish nationalities. The narrator Charles Prentice is a travel writer whose profession is 'crossing frontiers' and constantly 'on trips of non-man's land' (Ballard, 1996, p9). In *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come,* which are the focus of this chapter, suburbia is relocated in the centre of metropolitan London. *Millennium People* (2003) is a story about the pampered middle-class residents in Chelsea Marina, a wealthy gated estate in London, organizing themselves around petty demonstrations, and *Kingdom Come* (2012[2006]) depicts a consumer kingdom of a motorway town near Heathrow centreed around a shopping mall and reveling in nationalist violence against racial minorities. The car-crash fetishists with a cult leader in *Crash* and the

residents-turned-tribes in *High-Rise* precede the criminal communities in these crime fictions. The residents in CCTV-protected zones of leisure find relief in meaningless violence and small crimes, led by overtly eloquent figures who are more self-consciously rebelling against the System.

Set in well-off, central locations rather than peripheral urban wastelands, Gasiorek (2005) holds, these thrillers depict the success of social systems rather than their malfunctions. Affluent forms of suburbia indicate capitalism's total triumph and, depicting an exhausted future, late Ballard is disenchanted with the possibility of political change in postmodernity (Gasiorek, 2005). In contrast, others read Ballard's thrillers as a sustained act of subversion and a continuation of the surrealist poetics (Baxter, 2008b) and an adaptation of situationist politics to the so-called control society. In light of Marxist and neo-Marxist political theories, the transgressive crime imagines ways of resisting and subverting the system of consumer capitalism (Colombino, 2006, Noys, 2007, Matthew, 2013).

The contradictory readings testify that Ballard's suburbia is still an ambiguous and difficult site both open and closed, both inside and outside dominant cultures. In my reading, I suggest that Ballard's suburbia is where the form of network interacts with the bounded whole. Reactionary to the dissolution of borders in the globalized era, suburbia affords security by its invincible enclosure: 'prosperous suburbia was one of the end states of history. Once achieved, only plague, flood, or nuclear war could threaten its grip' (Ballard, 2003, p91). In the shifting geopolitical landscape, suburbia is called into being again as test sites where oppositional forces in the dominant culture can be played out: 'the suburbs are the perfect social laboratory. You can cook up any pathogen and test how virulent it is' (Ballard, 2012, p210). The analogy of the virus implies that the suburban in/outlands, with their insulated nature, possess a higher degree of freedom to promote acts of passage, transgression, and renegotiation of boundaries. The rise of new forms of gated suburbia as concentrated nodes embedded within a global network illustrates the modality and mobility of suburbia's 'bivalent' structure, its potent affordances and lasting lure.

Forms of heterotopia and liminality

Nora Pleßke (2014, 0375) reads *Millennium People*, alongside other contemporary London novels published in the era of Blair's premiership (1997 - 2007), as a manifestation of the 'millennial anomie' or normlessness. Posting the Blair era at the threshold between the end of the stable binary structure of the cold war and the rise of new-age international terrorism and time-space compression that brought about the proliferation of simulated non-places of transit, Pleßke reads *Millennium People* as illustrating a mental structure of horror, uncertainty, and fear in reaction to the collapse of social forms and values, the void and solitude of the urban non- places. I suggest that Pleßke's reading adheres to the official narrative of crime as the antithesis of social order. Her notion of the Blair era as a period of formlessness also lacks a nuanced consideration of the heterogeneous forms that organize society. The transnational network in globalization is not to be reductively perceived as a homogenizing, decentreing force. The sprawling network does not merely bring about dissolution of borders and vernacularity. The neoliberal society that is increasingly organized by multiple networks is neither a coherent structure nor completely without structure. Ballard's criminal community, with highly organized forms of sociality, do not simply represent a decentering force and formlessness. Rather, they serve an infrastructural role in the globalized network.

Ballard's infrastructural community finds its counterpart in sociological and anthropological notion of liminal community. In postmodern discourses, postmodern communities are celebrated for its liminality and in-betweenness. The liminal space is seen as 'terrain vague' (Mariani and Barron, 2014, p1), an interstitial space on the edge defined against closure and hegemonic authority. In anthropological discussions of liminality, the formation of the community is seen as inherently liminal, involving an anti-structural period of transgression and regeneration. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) understands community is a collective that shares a common experience through a rite of passage, which he calls 'communitas'. 'Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality, and from beneath structure, in inferiority' (Turner and Abrahams, 1969, p128). Turner's notion of liminal community welcomes temporary, fluid and open groupings outside institutions. However, as Gerald Delanty (2003) points out, if the formation of a community is grounded on differentiation, it would justify injustice to others as a necessary means to mark the boundary of a collective. Delanty's intervention indicates that the realization

of the theoretical concept of liminality in social reality can become problematic, as it might justify violence, exclusion, and destruction.

A shadowy double of the liberal conception of liminality is its problematic association with a primitive, mythical and cultish notion of sociality. In Blanchet's (1988, cited in Delanty, 2003) concept of an 'elective community' and sociologist Michel Maffesoli's (1996, cited in Delanty, 2003, p126) concept of a 'neo-tribe community' which are united by 'quasi-religious sect-like movement' and are 'secretive, vitalistic and highly emotional'. These discussions demonstrate that the seemingly open and free-floating network of liminal communities are structured by a symbolic order and an emotional bond that characterize tribal group, myth and religion. Understanding liminality and heterotopia against structure thus creates a series of problems. There is the problem of atavism and disquieting compliance with death and destruction as Delanty (2003) suggests. There is the problem of addressing halves of Ballard's text which always frustratingly entangled. The relationship between liminality and structure, therefore, needs reconsideration.

Kevin Hetherington (1997) also opposes the oversimplifying understanding of liminal space, marginal place, heterotopia, and place of otherness as sites of counter-hegemonic resistance, protest, and transgression. Such an assumption, Hetherington argues, polarizes order and disorder, centre and margin, and overlooks the fact that the margins are still implicated and integral in social ordering. Alternatively, Hetherington sees heterotopia and liminal space as relational concepts that derive their significance from their contrasting relationship with other locations. Rather than existing independently with inherent value, their distinctiveness lies in the incongruous nature of their organization. Recognizing that the ordering principles of heterotopias are, as Foucault suggests, an unexpected bricolage of signs, Hetherington (1997, p7) emphasizes that bricolage itself serves as a mode of ordering: 'Ordering and disordering go together, as do centres and margins, in ways that are tangled, uncertain and topologically complex'. Hetherington also talks about the problem of liminality alongside that of the carnivalesque. While Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) sees the marketplace as a carnivalesque site for chance encounters with the exotic where customary social relations are suspended. Bakhtin has overemphasized the transgressive freedom in the marketplace, which is not without structure though it appears less confining. Hetherington points out that like

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Bakhtin, Turner also fails to see the process of ordering in liminality.

What accompanies the reevaluation of heterotopia is inevitably a reevaluation of its counterpart: structure and order. The heart of the problem of associating liminality and the carnivalesque with a lack of order and structure is, as Hetherington understands it, that order is often seen as 'something monolithic, static, conservative and prescriptive'. In the contradictory interpretations of Ballard's suburbia as sites of disorder, the society of global capitalism is also seen as a hegemonic, homogeneous force. Hetherington's criticism of Turner is not unlike Levine's criticism of poststructuralists for seeing structures as merely monolithic and confining. As poststructuralism and postmodernism are seeking marginal spaces outside existing structures, orders and binaries, they have assigned these spaces with too much transgressive potential and unbridled freedom while overlooking the fact that they are still implicated in structures and ordering. Pinning down such views as a misconception of ordering, Hetherington (1997, p35) proposes that 'ordering is not just about fixing things in an established way so that things make sense, it is principally about ways in which social activities are arranged and distributed and the contingent effects of those arrangements'. In other words, ordering does not necessarily imply a fixed sequence. It is a contingent way of arranging and distributing within a performative context. Hetherington's revised view of ordering is also akin to Levine's (re)definition of form as something plural and uncertain rather than fixed and permanent.

Levine and Hetherington's ideas constitute a revisionist way of looking at social, cultural and spatial forms as well as a corrective to the anti-structural understanding of liminality. In the context of globalization, their ideas also converge in the way they see urban society as a network bearing multiple forces at play. The notion of ordering as a performance, as Hetherington acknowledges, comes from actor-network theory, in which Bruno Latour uses the laboratory to illustrate how actors are interconnected in a network of association and translation. The laboratory, a heterotopia, has the topology of a bounded network. Similarly for Levine, culture is a result of the collaboration between the bounded whole and the network.

Networks are hardly as expansive and liberating as poststructuralists like to see them but need to be bounded in wholes and rely on small nodes and centres to function. Meanwhile, wholes are not solely restrictive; they also contain individuals within a finite space so that they could engage in meaningful forms of networking and communication. The network gives the whole open and fluid boundaries; the whole stops the network from endless extension and creates possibilities of rearrangements and reconfigurations of people, material, and meaning.

Contributing to Levine and Hetherington's ideas, Ballard's text is not simply a fantasy of structural dissolution or mimetic reflections of the way that crimes enact radical de-centreing of social coordinates. Rather, they use crime as a fictional strategy to expose how these multilayered social structures work and interact. Meanwhile, they challenge the understanding that suburban communities are passive, segregated and atomized, a notion that overemphasizes the enclosure of a bounded form; and corrects the understanding that liminal communities are transgressive and unbounded.

Forms of crime and crime fiction

Compared to the aloof, near-omnipotent detectives in golden age British detective fictions, Ballard's detectives are more akin to the 'trench-coat hero' (also a chapter title in *Kingdom Come)* in American film noir that depicts crime as endemic to the social structure. Also departing from the institutional role of the detective who represents the state's voice to condemn and eradicate crime, Ballard's detective, investigating the death of a close relative, is driven by personal motives. Ballard's move towards crime fiction with elements of psychological thriller is less surprising than it seems. In a way all Ballardian heroes are detectives of violent intent in urban spaces. Vaughan's photography isolates the crash scene like a protected crime scene, re-enacting death and casualties to decipher our collective dream of speed and desire. *High-Rise* begins with Laing witnessing the escalating social unrest around him and pondering on the barbaric tendencies embedded in the architectural form of the high-rise. In turn, the amateur detective in Ballard's late fictions is involuntarily involved in activities, slow to realize what is happening, passively led to places, and altogether too muddle-minded to decide whether the criminal community fascinate or repel him. The ambiguity of Ballard's texts

partly comes from a conflated perspective of a spontaneous flaneur and a purpose-driven detective.

Ballard's crime fictions repeat the same plot. They start with a crime that sets the protagonist on a journey to reconnect with an estranged relative or ex-lover. During the process, he is attracted to a cult leader of a criminal group, often a doctor or a psychiatrist, who treats the suburban community, or the entire twentieth century, as a collective patient, with the ambition to liberate the bored and brainwashed consumers with a shock-therapy of random violence. It is more than obvious to the readers from the very start of the novel that the murderer is the leader of the rebel group whose hidden identity is only a perfunctory mask. In reading the surrealist intertexts in Ballard's late fictions, Baxter (2009) notes the quality of transparency and the parallel with René Magritte's surrealist painting *The Menaced Assassin*.

René Magritte, *The Menaced Assassin* (1927)

The transparency of the painting, Baxter (2009) argues, is provocative and invitational – it ushers a line of associative enquiry and calls for a penetrative and immersive look at the traces of past beneath immaculate cultural surfaces that are also at work in Ballard's crime fictions. As these fictions move from whodunit to whydunit, i.e., from identity of the murderer to the relation in the criminal network, the processualism invites a close reading of neglected traces of

history. For Baxter (2009), the painting's as well as the fiction's transparency is a pathway to the past / the unconscious. Baxter's emphasis on a detective's inquisitive look only sums up half of Ballard's novel, which is immediately ironized and countered by the other part proffered by the *flaneur*. The messianic seer charting the historical and cultural unconscious is himself a psychopath and a fascist leader blinded to his own crime. The hero is both propelled by a moral obligation for family reunion and passively following an unconscious taste for violence. The criminals' revolutions, as well as the detective's investigation, are self-defeating. In a circular narrative, the detective re-enacts the murder act and becomes the murderer. The detective and the villain are not in polarity of order/disorder, justice/injustice, centre/peripheral. Rather, they play interchangeable roles. As the antagonistic categories of detective/murderer, psychiatrist/psychopath, and pathology/therapy are conflated, the narrative also goes in a loop, with no real beginning or end.

The conflation creates a flatness that echoes Magritte's painting. Both the painting and the fiction draw our attention to the forms of their medium. Recalling the mimetic traditions of landscape paintings and the techniques of focal perspective developed in the Renaissance, it draws attention to its formal arrangement and planetary operations that condenses reality onto a flat canvas. Placing a modern murder mystery within a classist background, the painting recalls Edouard Manet's painting *The Luncheon on the Grass* (1863) where the female nude and suited gents, staring unabashedly at the viewer in their Bohemian style, appear completely out of place for the rustic background. The painting's transparency exposes its careful manoeuvring of perspective, structure, and geometry. With a series of frames and multiplanar arrangement, space is both infinitely deep and unfolding onto a depthless surface. The flatness also announces the painter's ambition to grasp all perspectives at once. The two men in suits holding fishnets, rather than facing the potential murderer in the middle, turn to face the audience, so that we can see their faces rather than their backs. Such 'economy of representation' functions in a similar way as what Rosalind Krauss (1999a, p300) calls the 'double face-out' in James Coleman's photonovel and comic strips taken from lower cultures. Rather than using reverse shots and cutting between points of view back and forth to represent human encounters, Coleman has his character all face out of the frame.

Krauss (1999a, p300) argues that the artificialness of the double face-out 'addresses itself to the structure of his medium'.

Ballard's crime fictions use disengaging plots and schematic characters to call attention to its affected stylishness. The two characters – the detective and the murderer – who are supposed to occupy antagonistic positions in the dramatic space share the same inclination for violence. They collaborate in the same crime in order to address a personal trauma or a historical catastrophe. Their dramatic dialogues appear a schizophrenic monologue where they try to finish each other's sentence in a string of 'yes-ands'. The monologic dialogue also draws attention to the novelist technique of contriving dialogues to increase mimetic tellibility. The flatness of Ballard's prosaic style adds to the flatness of his monologic dialogues.

The use of 'double face out', for Krauss (1999a, p300), creates an 'impossibility of suturing'. Rather than identifying with the camera as it turns back and forth within the dramatic space, the viewer is unable to be sutured within the diegetic space. Similarly, Magritte's painted figures, with their smirk and open postures, both invite and deter the viewers. In *Millennium People*, the knees of a character are both 'a long-distance warning and an oblique come-on' (85). The community is an enclosed network both deterring external investigation and enticing the intruder to be complicit in their criminality.

Ballard's flat narrative also draws attention to the heightened forms of time and space in crime fiction and reveals its operations to suture the reader into the game space. Emerging from the suburban corners of culture, crime fiction is an orderly genre. In Tzvetan Todorov's (2019 [1966], p291) configuration, crime fiction features a 'double temporality' - the timeline of the detective's investigation that leads to revelation of the criminal the and the reconstructed timeline of the murder act. Two timelines go opposite directions and converge at the point of the crime's solution. The spatial ordering in crime fiction is united by a powerful eye of the detective, who, especially in hard- boiled traditions, solves crime through navigating the maze-like urban space. His spatial ordering communicates an epistemological anxiety and a rationalist bourgeois impulse to render the city ultimately knowable and controllable. Crime fiction has been criticized for reducing the complexity of social milieu to an individualism - the detective's oblique eye and singular perspective. David Schmid (1995), defending the genre's

potential for serious social critique, argues that the individualism of crime fiction helps interconnect various forms of contacts, and unify the otherwise shapeless and formless social milieu. Following the detective's restricted viewpoint, Schmid (1995, p265) argues, the reader can identify as a member of multiple communities ranging from nations to localities and resumes the 'full complexity of people's spatial identifications'. Individualism in Schmid's view allows the reader to see their agency as an actor within a multi-layered, intricately networked field of social forces. Schmitt's defense of crime fiction only confirms the schizophrenic nature of crime fiction - the joy of reading crime fiction is participatory. Rather than representing crime, crime fiction constructs crime in orderly forms of space and time and invites the readers to derive pleasure from deciphering them. The reader is supposed to join the game of temporal and spatial navigation as a collaborative player. A 'photographic art' that illuminates the underbellies of civil society is also a formalist game.

These orderly forms of time and space that govern the genre of crime fiction are also flattened in Ballard's crime fictions. In the model of 'double temporality', the detective is both progressively solving a case and retrogressively constituting the past. The progressive and retrogressive timelines become bounded and conflated in Ballard's fiction: as the detective investigates a past crime, he unconsciously re-enacts it as he is enlisted into the villain's next act of crime. The flaneur- detective is also trapped in a space that repeats a circular topology mirrored by the M25. Ballard's 'flatness' in appropriating the genre reveals the reader's complicity with crime. By drawing on the unconscious desire for transgression and luring the audiences into working out the rules of the game, it invites them into the game.

Crime fiction, like Magritte's painting, constructs crime as an enclosed game space. In the painting, it is hard to tell if the characters, dressed in suits but appearing cartoonish, are serious or playful. Ballard's villains are also both serious and playful. On the one hand, they engage in a criminal project with an earnest political intent and a solemn investment in the future - to reinvent and revolutionize the affectless social order. On the other hand, they are willingly trapped on an asylum looking for a participant and addressee for their ritualist killing. As the detective in his repeated conversations with different members of the criminal group, he is caught up in a gamified language – a set of idiomatic expressions and tautologies. Phrases

such as 'amiable disaster', 'elective madness', and 'willed insanity' refer back and forth to each other and are incomprehensible to outsiders. Despite its serious investment in social critique as Schmid emphasizes, crime fiction is a cultish cultural form that captivates the readers in a symbolic game space and feeds on their voyeuristic desire. Golden age crime fiction in post-war Britain worked in a similar way – by framing each death as a unique event in a gated setting to be contemplated by an audience and carefully worked out by a detective, the unique time-space category of death in the artificial setting counters the meaningless, unnoticed, and incontrollable deaths in the great war. From the social panacea, the readers regain power and control amid the powerlessness of war and derive an aesthetic pleasure from the fictional representation of crime. Ballard's writing reveals crime fiction's schizophrenic nature and its double function as the science and myth for the bourgeois class. As a cultural product, it offers the readers a sense of control and meaning to counter the contingency of death. Both functions serve to stabilize rather than subvert social order.

Crime fiction's social function is analogous to that of gated suburbia in globalized society. Ballard's suburbanites are mobile and transgressive. Through crossing frontiers and pushing boundaries, they serve as the nodes of connections that buttress a spreading network. An expansive network cannot function without units of concentrated power stations with heightened organizational rules. The enclosure and boundedness of suburbia serve to temporarily unify the inherently uncontainable culture into a hub of relations that are containable and navigable, offering the residents a sense of power and agency. It also acts as a dramatic stage to perform alternative social relations. In the same way that suburbia undergirds the global network by managing its expansion in geographical enclosure, its circular form of crime also bounds the suppressed discontent into abstract, monologic utterances without revolutionary energy. The violent demonstrations and meaningless terrorism in the fiction create a centralized and bounded sphere where contradictory impulses and tensions are expressed and released. The way transgressive crime/politics feeds back into perpetuation of the normative order is mirrored by the topology of the suburban landscape where all signposts point back to the same centre and mobile acts lead back to the starting point. M25, featuring prominently in both fictions, is a visual metaphor for the way that suburbia holds together an open and expansive network into a bounded whole.

2. *Millennium People* **– A New Tribe of Gypsies**

In place of the traditional separation between the urban centre and the suburban on the peripheral, the globalized city comprises of a constellation of economic clusters, cultural hubs, populate by a new class of global entrepreneurs who are replacing traditional bourgeois and depriving them of their privileges. The suburbia in *Millennium People* acts as a laboratory where the 'bourgeoise-turned-new-proletariats' imaginatively subvert social hierarchies with a totalizing, formalist and 'pan-transgressive' politics.

The novel follows psychologist David Markham, as he strays into a rebel community in Chelsea Marina, a fictional residential compound in Chelsea, to investigate the terrorist bomb attack in Heathrow airport that kills his first wife, Laura. He suspects that his wife's death is connected to trivial protests by a fringe group and sets out to investigate various protest rallies led by the film lecturer Kay Churchill. Visiting her flat in Chelsea Marina, Markham observes that the residential complex is built on the site of a former gasworks and right next to 'a stream of coded voltages sluicing through concealed conduits under the foreign exchange floors' (180). Unable to keep up with the investment cycle, the compound is rendered obsolete:

> The Thames shouldered its way past Blackfriars Bridge, impatient with the ancient piers, no longer the passive stream that slid past Chelsea Marina, but a rush of ugly water that had scented the open sea and was ready to make a run for it (180).

As the river is impatient to run past old industrial sites, global capital is also impatient to abandon Chelsea Marina and rush towards its next target. As Kay complains, the compound is now 'the size of a toilet and smells like it'. The once-affluent compound degenerates into a high-priced slum, where maintenance is practically non-existent, but the price keeps going up. The badly maintained estate is being discarded by new capital as property developers are eager to revitalize the area by constructing luxury flats. Disadvantaged by the change, Kay brands the middle class as 'new proletariats' and leads them to penetrate the soft bellies of bourgeois culture. As Markham points out, the 'new proletariats' and 'docile victims' are 'furnished with private schools and BMWs' (104). She invents a radical, totalizing, and 'pan-transgressive' politics that means to 'abolish the 20ᵗʰ century. Ban tourism, politics, commerce,

education – all corrupt' (67). The 'docile victims' that attempt to shake the iron cage forged by consumer culture, education and cultural institutions are themselves perpetrators of the system forming its major bulk. The middle class become self-exiled, self-marginalized suburbanites, swearing to dismantle a culture they are enmeshed in. The riots she leads have been normalized as an everyday occurrence and a plain sight, carried out with 'no anger, as if putting out garbage' (4). Crime forms part of everyday rituals.

In Kay's pan-transgressive politics, the ideological other encompasses the entire sociopolitical system. As a result, as Markham notes, her 'well-rehearsed rant' (54) and demonstrative posture in front of the public is completely detached from reality. Located in an 'outside', her performative stage allows all normative rules to be challenged. Involving Markham in a terrorist action, she plants a bomb in the theatrical space of the NFT. The action itself is also theatrical and mediated by screens. Markham disguises himself as a security guard and witnesses the attack on the 'metalized skin' of the screen (121). After the attack, Markham is joined by Dr. Gould, the novel's antihero and mastermind of abstract crime, who disguises himself as a waiter. The two admire the spectacle of the NFT on fire in a gondola of the Millennium Wheel. While NFT is a legacy of the Festival of Britain in 1951, on the same stretch of the south bank, the Millennium Wheel is an iconic structure in Tony Blair's Southbank project opened in 2000, together with 'two more fakes' (180) of Shakespeare's Globe and Tate Modern. The two architectures from two cultural projects form an echo. Both are designed to shape public perception. Both eschew reminders of Britain's imperial past and look ahead towards a modern nation. Markham and Gould's terrorism echoes the birth of British pop art movement in 1956, marked by the exhibition 'This is Tomorrow' in the Whitechapel Gallery, five years after the Festival of Britain and sharing its ethos.

In another escalated demonstration against maintenance charges in Chelsea Marina, the residents mount a barricade of cars, a scene that resonates with the carnivalesque automobile parade in *The Unlimited Dream Company.* Cars are set ablaze, starting a 'bonfire' (228), and Markham is 'excited by the camaraderie, by the sense of a shared enemy' (230). The standoff resembles a child's play, where children cheer as the police drive a bulldozer and lift a Fiat Uno up in the air. The ludic nature of the protest is also enhanced by Angela, who has switched her role of a protester to a police officer. Identity has become a role in a collective game. Kay's spectacular protests - setting fire to the houses in Chelsea Marina and NFT and drawing Hitler Mustaches and forelocks on the portraits of BBC's director generals - cannot change reality other than trigger different reactions from various institutions. The BBC attributes Kay's petty demonstrations to deep dissatisfactions of the 'self-indulgent' baby-boomer generation (149), in reaction to which Kay accuses the BBC of brainwashing the middle class with its 'regime of moderation and good sense' and 'ideology of passivity and self-restraint' (150). Paradoxically, Kay's criticism of the BBC makes her a successful columnist and TV pundit, her criticism does not have intrinsic value outside its antagonistic stance against mainstream media.

In Kay's performative protests, her engagement with the audience appears rehearsed and constrived, lacking authenticity. The calculated discursive strategies further detach her revolutionary practice from reality. Almost like a linguistic parody of the Levittown study, Kay's field study of Twickenham, a much more prosperous neighborhood than Chelsea Marina, is conducted through a series of questionnaires and dialogues with the residents, harking back to Vaughan's transgressive questionnaire on sexual obsessions. As Markham notes, 'the catalyst that had radicalized Chelsea Marina was missing' in Twickenham. Undaunted by the challenge, Kay disguises herself as a researcher on social habits with a 'a game smile' (91) and presses on the residents with suggestions to wash less and travel less. In an interview of an old couple, Kay raises her usual propositions to the woman who answers the door, which are summed up and reported to the husband sitting inside, as if in a game of Chinese whispers.

…Over her shoulder she replied to her husband: 'Dinner parties, dear.'

'Can't stand them. Judith?'

'That's what I said.'

'What?'

 … 'Wife swapping? Should they be banned? Or are they the opiate that keeps the middle classes under control?'

'Judith'?

'Wife swapping, dear.' …

'And animals?'

'I'm very fond of them, of course'

'They need your affection?'

'Absolutely.'

'So you'd sign a petition to revoke laws against sexual intercourse with animals?' (92)

Conversation is a fictional event and a mimetic mode of narration. Here, however, the tellibility and mimetic quality of the direct speech are weakened by the reporting style. The diegetic space is flattened. The seriousness of Kay's political message is also subsumed and diluted by the process of mediation. In a series of trick questions, Kay engages the couple in a word play. Similarly, Kay's bombs are 'acoustic provocations' (81) designed to engage the public in a linguistic war/game. Politicized vocabulary fluctuates to justify personal needs, and the listeners are forced to 'pick a side' (151). The linguistic war implicates everyone, and in a self-enclosed discursive network, stances, identities, values, and beliefs are fluidly defined against each other.

In Markham's conversations with the other characters, he is also a token interlocuter, a psychiatrist in a talk therapy. Other than jokes and satirical comments, Markham hardly offers any direct, serious pushback to the characters' views. Determined to 'unpack their obsessions. And unroll them in the daylight like a cheap carpet' (65), he is mostly a passive receiver, occasionally asking rhetorical questions and offering prompts to assist their long confessions. In his TV series - *A Neuroscientist's Look at God,* Markham uses the language of mathematics to explain the concept of God: 'the idea of God as a huge imaginary void, the largest nothingness the human mind can invent. Not a vast something out there, but a vast absence'. Gould, claiming that he 'disagrees', presents a view that is almost identical to that of Markham's: 'there were real voids here, unlimited space inside a small skull. Looking for God is a dirty business. You find God in a child's shit, in the stink of stale corridors, in a nurse's tired feet' (245). Sharing the vocabulary of zero, void, nothingness, they pretend to be interlocutors disagreeing with each other. As Gould later confides, he is drawn to Markham's ideas and chooses to plant the bomb next to the luggage bearing Markham's name, which accidentally

kills his wife. Gould's bomb is a belated echo to Markham's utterance on TV. Both attempt at an abstract, mathematical language to describe a pure form of violence alienated from ideological and economic use of the word. In this dialogue where Gould uses the same vocabulary of emptiness and absence to account for the meaning of pointless crime, Gould is as if paraphrasing Markham's own ideas to himself. The dialogue resembles a schizophrenic monologue by two people who try to finish each other's sentences.

> 'Think of all those passengers, every one of them buzzing like a hive with plans and projects. Holidays, business conferences, weddings – so much purpose and energy, so many small ambitions that no one will ever remember.'
>
> 'It would be better if the plane crashed?'
>
> 'Yes! That would mean something. An empty space we could stare into with real awe, senseless, inexplicable, as mysterious as the Grand Canyon. We can't see the road for all the signposts. Let's clear them away, so we can gaze at the mystery of an empty road. We need more demolition jobs…'
>
> 'Even if people are killed?'
> 'Yes, sadly.' (249)

The pointless deaths in a plane crash are set against the commonplace nature of travelling, and the mystery of nothingness against the planned routines of power flights. Gould's staged violence brings about a radical dislocation of order. It creates a liminal, heterotopic space of a bricolage of signs. The visual geometry evokes a quasi-religious enrapture after being seized by the chanciness of cosmic events. The rupture in time and space creates a liminal passage between secular reality and divinity. 'A pointless crime, but the world pauses. We listen, and the universe has nothing to say. There's only silence, so we have to speak' (261). In the negative theophanic moment, Gould acquires the authority of a prophet, a mediator and translator of the divine will / cosmic message.

The extended gaze at the void recalls the gaze of the camera that blasts open the continuum of history and exposes the historical and optical unconscious. Like Atget's proto-surrealist photography that 'pump[s] the aura out of reality' (Benjamin, 1985, p250), Gould's project frames the empty street as an abandoned crime scene in a noir film.

Benjamin (1986[1936], p242) writes at in his *Work of Art* essay that 'fascism, and as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology'. The perception offered by photography allows us to experience aesthetic pleasure from destructing the aura of reality and abolishing natural, first, given order. Its capacity to establish a second order creates the situation for a new form of politics 'which fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art' (Benjamin, 1986, p242). While Kay's performative, gamified protests armed with Marxist theory is a way of 'politicizing art', Gould renders violence aesthetic. Gould and Kay's revolutions also serve as each other's echoes.

For Gould, the atrocities of the world wars represent the first order that he needs to 'abolish'. However, the way he addresses historical trauma repeats its logic. Regarding himself as a delegate of the brain-damaged children in the derelict zone near Heathrow, Gould stages the death of randomly picked celebrities in order to speak to the atrocities of the 'genocidal wars' (182). The death scene calls for the interpretation and participation from the spectators. A meaningless casualty, staged by Gould, is transformed from the given to the conceived. Occurrence is transformed into utterance. Such utterance, however, uses a mathematical language. 'The legion of nonentities were multiplying the tables of a new mathematics based on the power of zero, generating a virtual psychopathology from their shadows' (155). The meaning he is searching and the dialogue he is building with God is underpinned by a mathematical principle.

For Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), language has a double tendency towards both abstraction and concreteness. While instrumental use of language is monologic, aesthetic use of language preserves its dialogic nature. The former tends towards logical purity and rhythm, and the latter towards concreteness of subjectivity and the unrepeatability of actual being. In the former, language is a generic container to a stable message; in the latter, language is a medium with its own specificity. Gould's staged deaths are a mathematical utterance divorced from the normative context. The heterogeneity of victims and disorganized contingencies of occurrences are unified by and reduced to a set of relations, in angles, gestures and postures with no referential meaning in reality. The abstraction and purity of his linguistic form cannot contain

concrete political experiences and thus loses its dialogic power. It is an enclosed form of abstract dialogism that no longer connects to reality. His structurally and mechanically multiplying acts of crime tend towards monologism, enclosure and totality of meaning. Gould is the absolute author/speaker absolved from an ethical obligation to the other.

As Gould finally reveals to Markham, the Heathrow bomb that kills Laura is an accident that no one has intended, a hiccup in the operation of Kay's anti-tourist campaign to shut down Heathrow for several days without killing anyone. Since the game spills into reality, Gould has parted ways from Kay and starts to arrange for random killings with a touch of contingency to imitate the workings of reality, akin to the way photography captures history's spark of contingency. Seeking to eradicate the virtual and game element by involving 'real' deaths, Gould's attempt at realism is not unlike crime fiction's investment in 'true crime'. Although real casualties are involved, it is still a narrative not much different from Kay's maneuver.

Gould's self-destructive politics expresses men's impulse for self-alienation. Gould's Bedfont mental hospital, renovated from a Victorian architecture, is located in the operational zone of Heathrow. A 'Peter Pan mentally marooned on his asylum island' (166), Gould perceives the nondescript zone as an open land 'without past or future' (168). The suburban outland, however, is embedded in real time and space in cycles of urban regeneration. The badly maintained Chelsea Marina is soon to be replaced by luxury flats. Gould's island of freedom is soon to become the motorway town of Brooklands. In the end of the novel, the mayor responds to the middle-class riots by waiving the maintenance fee, and the property developers have agreed to temporarily postpone their next project. The middle-class revolution, rather than overhauling social order, has only slowed down time and bargained for profits. In this sense, Chelsea Marina resembles the Palladian villa surrounded by a featureless landscape in Ballard's 1962 short story 'The Garden of Time'. Trying to deter a vast horde approaching from afar, the Count and the Countess in the story pluck the 'time flowers' in the garden to reverse time only temporarily, before the mob eventually break in. The spectacular effect of the avant-garde's revival has a short-lived brilliance of a blossoming flower.

The in-betweenness of the nondescript suburb is mirrored in the noir setting of the climactic scene of Gould's death. Markham is unable to witness first-hand the key events where

Gould attempts to assassinate the home secretary and then is shot dead by Stephen Dexter. He can only infer what happens from moving shadows and the sound of gunshots. Arriving only too late at the scene, he takes over Dexter's pistol and is mistaken for the hero who has saved the home secretary and his wife in front of the press. For Gould, Markham is a 'collaborator' complicit in his crime. For the police and the press, Markham is a 'police spy without realizing it' (268). The roles of the criminal and the detective are interchangeable. The spectators make the villain/hero, detective/murderer. Relationality has replaced identity.

As Markham observes, mirroring Gould's attempt to seek meaning in meaningless death, the exodus of Chelsea Marina residents is deliberately cut short, 'a heroic failure redefined itself as a success' (293). 'They were the vanguard of an itinerant middle class, a new tribe of university-trained gypsies' (5) discovering nowhere new and always returning home. The middle-class avant-gardes are unconsciously practicing a self-defeating, formalist politics. Their provocative opinion wars are a 'linguistic framing' of reality that communicates nothing. In their deliberately pointless rebellions, the demolition of the Peter Pan statue is the only legacy of the revolt. Like Peter Pan's shadow is sewn to his body, they are artificially sewing the other (replicas of self) to themselves.

3. *Kingdom Come* – the Geometry of the Crowd

Gould's asylum island in the operation zone of Heathrow has materialized into a motorway town on M25 named Brooklands in *Kingdom Come*. Unlike the past buried several feet under in the archaeological sites of *Concrete Island*; and unlike the past that returns to Vermilion Sands in unrecognizable travesties, Brooklands is saturated with explicit signs of violence and historical decadence. The past is manifest in its everyday architecture out in the air: the semi-detached houses with flying flags, St George shirts and racing tracks staggeringly reminiscent of the 1930s Nazi Germany. Organizing their lives around a shopping mall with a dome shaped like a temple, the suburbanites are 'deliberately re-primitivizing themselves…The lights are on, but they're retreating into the inner darkness, into superstition and unreason'. The spotlights of the football stadium also create a geometry of shadows and a stark distinction between light and darkness. Without a charismatic, visionary leader, the mallgoers and sports fans form a clan around their own inner darkness. The ceding of light is also mirrored by the novel's tone of

despair. The direct interior monologues of the narrator, the hallmark modernist literary device, are indistinguishable from advertisement slogans: 'Let the road decide'. While the moral message of *Crash* is deferred in its convoluted sentences, the thesis of *Kingdom Come* is loud and clear: 'consumerism creates a void that only fascism can meet'. The workstation of the protagonist Pearson's father is explicitly compared to 'a neo-fascist alter' (69).

Written in a plain and prosaic style, Ballard's crime fictions have dropped the carnivalesque energy, visual opulence and painterly appeal his earlier works. While the games in *Vermilion Sands* and *The Unlimited Dream Company* are multi-pixelated, multi-coloured, interspecies, spanning geological time, penetrated by auroral or psychedelic light, the revolutions in *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come* are banal and unimaginative - looting in an Asian supermarket, bombing Heathrow airport and random shooting in local shopping malls. The gated enclaves are players on a chessboard in starkly oppositional relations. A persistent binary of light and darkness swings back to mould and remould the geometry of the crowd.

Compared to *Millennium People* whose depiction of the tribe of gypsies still retain some degree of ambivalence, fun and irony, *Kingdom Come'*s primitive crowd are more formidable. Compare the last paragraphs of the two novels:

> Chelsea Marina was a place of real promise, when a young paediatrician persuaded the residents to create a unique republic, a city without street signs, laws without penalties, events without significance, a sun without shadows (*2003*, p294).

> One day there would be another Metro-Centre and another desperate and deranged dream. Marchers would drill and wheel while another cable announcer sang out the beat. In time, unless the sane woke and rallied themselves… (2006, p310).

Dropping the last tinge of poetry, *Kingdom Come* ends with a beckoning tone and an explicit moral message. As Benjamin's angel of history desires to stay to repair the damage and awaken the dead, Ballard is calling for the 'sane' rather than 'the insane' to rally themselves. Has the detached author, who has never directly addressed his readers and always denied them ethical certainty, and who always trusts psychopathology to be the way out, seem to have lost his composure?

In *Millennium People*, Kay's protests are mediated by language. In performative debates and monologic dialogues, two parties can even freely swap roles. Gould's staged violence also

has an ethical and moral concern. In *Kingdom Come*, the use of 'friend-enemy', with a more explicit reference to Carl Schmitt, is more absolute and abstract. In his *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt (2017[1934]) argues that the political has 'no normative meaning, but an existential meaning only' (49). The political enemy is not economic competitor or debating adversary and the political concept needs to be understood in its 'concrete and existential' (27) sense, 'not to be mixed or weakened by economic, moral, and other conceptions' (28). The political entity, Schmitt argues, is 'by its very nature a decisive entity' (43). The right to decide who is the enemy and declare war defines a political entity. In Ballard's suburban outlands, the friend-enemy demarcations people draw in their heads - between the middle class and the working class, nationalists and immigrants, male fighters and female victims / caretakers – are both absolute and flexible, both serious and arbitrary, both concrete and abstract. The concept of the political, after decanting normative meanings, becomes a gamified, empty term that breeds senseless violence.

The friend-enemy construct shares the 'bivalent' structure of the grid, which allows for the free discharge of unconscious desires and flexible reordering of normative relations. In *Millennium People*, the suburbanites leading anti-globalization, anti-travel protests are themselves mobile elites and 'a new type of gypsies'. The millennium wheel is a 'vast and stationary carousel, forever boarded by millions of would-be passengers' (159). The antagonistic political rigor of the suburbanites has only fuelled the expansion of the global network.

In *Kingdom Come*, the football hooligans and mallgoers are also surrounded by circular ruins – racing track from the 1930s reminiscent of the Nazi Germany. After a bomb attack in the Metro-Centre, the crowd of spectators starts to congregate and move in currents. They follow Pearson 'like commuters in a crowded railway terminal'.

> The unique internal geometry of the crowd had come into play, picking first one leader and then another. Apparently passive, they regrouped and changed direction according to no obvious logic, a slime mould impelled by gradients of boredom and aimlessness (139).

The totalized motion marks the bounded network of infrastructural community and mirrors the topology of avant-garde's formalized formlessness. It is an unthinking and mindless movement of pure contingency and freedom on the individual level and coordination and unity on the collective and unconscious level. A collective dream state. The slime mould of the crowd that follows no obvious logic has an internal order and centre. The half-automated process enhances the enclosure of the bounded whole. Time, space, and the narrative in the novel circulates around a hollow centre.

Although on a determined mission to investigate his father's death, Pearson's journey to Brooklands is as if led to the 'heart of darkness' by an invisible force. Dictated by the 'small-minded deities' (12) of traffic lights and the 'nagging arrow' of the indicator ticking at the dashboard, he unconsciously digresses into a slip road off the motorway. 'Always let the road decide' (10). Abandoning the attempt to reverse to the right track, Pearson finds himself in what the map indicates to be old Thames Valley villages, and now 'a terrain of inter-urban sprawl, a geography of sensory deprivation, a zone of dual carriageways and petrol stations, business parks and signposts to Heathrow' (12). The seemingly empty, nondescript and unrecognizable place is organized by a circular mobility that leads Pearson to the heart of Brooklands, a place that he sets out to investigate but as if reaches purely by accident.

The landscape of Brooklands is organized by centripetal forces that leads the travelers back to its heart. After several unsuccessful attempts to head back to London, Pearson discovers that he is unable to leave Brooklands as all roads seem to lead back to the dome of the shopping mall, Metro-Centre, and its immediate environs. The landscape is designed in such a way that channels mobility inward and precludes the possibility of escape. The shopping mall occupies a geographical centre in a huge magnetic field. As Pearson notices during the tour given by Tom Carradine, the public relations manager of Metro-Centre, the mall itself has the layout of a temple and an opera house; its peripheral spaces are interconnected by stairs and travelators that transport the shoppers to the central atrium, a circular concourse. The uniformed guards at the gate, the circle of cameras, the blaring martial music, and the combative manner of Tom Carradine hint at its strictly ordered and controlled state. The mall has no clock, and only the football match gives a vague clue of time. The physical layout of the

space, reminiscent of the panopticon in Foucault's analysis, suggests that shopping is less a spontaneous and unregulated practice than a timed and coerced form of labor. The spontaneous flow of desire in unanticipated directions implies a mode of mobility typical in car-racing, where the aim to reach a destination gives way to the processual and the free discharge of impulses.

Pearson's investigation of the crime also leads him back to the deep recesses of his mind and reveals his suppressed trauma – his spartan childhood, emotional estrangement from his dad, his sense of failure and incompetence caused by his powerful wife. On his way to visit Dr. Maxted's mental asylum, Pearson notes that Dr. Maxted is constructing a maze around his head with 'a jumbled atlas of back streets and slip roads' (113). In their convoluted conversation that again resembles a monologic talk therapy, while it looks as if Maxted is warning Pearson of the 'willed insanity' or 'elective psychopathy' (121) of the bored consumers who resort to fascism to energize their lives, he is also covertly planting the idea in Pearson's head, enticing him to implement the principle in his next social experiment with advertisement campaign. Like a customer eager to take the bait, Pearson willingly exploits his sense of humiliation and lets it feed into his commercial success.

In the transgressive advertisement campaign he designs for the cable presenter, David Cruise, Pearson unconsciously follows Maxted's strategy to tease out the fears and insecurities of the consumers. In huge posters and live shows, Cruise plays the desperate loner in a noir film, a threatening and confused husband, and a 'trapped creature of strange and wayward moods'. The shopper's mind is also transformed into a theatrical stage. 'Scenes from the collective dream forever playing in the back alleys of their minds' (177). Using the 'deep darkness' of the interior of the TV studio as his 'medium' (159), Cruise is surrounded 'in the pale aura of suburban fame'. He repeatedly refers to an abstract and never defined term 'enemy', which the townspeople take to be the Hampstead middle class and their cultural snobberies. Cruise also outlines a future full of hope and promises, and the townspeople launch racist attacks against Asians and eastern Europeans, energized by the hope to put them in 'a huge ghetto in east London'. Similar to Gould's psychopathologies powered by zero, the politics of Metro-Centre has no message. The suburbanites form 'a virtual political party' that

'represent[s] nothing' (178). 'Everyone in Brooklands was a friend, but out here someone was the enemy, constantly referred to by David Cruise on his cable programme but never defined' (182). Identity is dialectically defined and depends on a virtual enemy.

In one of the performative acts, Cruise lights a fuse and sets off an uprising in order to rally support for the dome, as the game gets out of hand, he is shot by Duncan Christie. The followers charge into the mall and block the entrance, in a stand-off with the police and home office. The mall turns into 'a medical nowhere zone of tubes, drips and ventilator pumps' (268) that sustains David's Cruise's dying body. The inmates place their trust and faith in the already dead Cruise and form a self-organizing regime, an echo to Blake's absorption of townspeople. As the mall malfunctions, the lights go off and turn the stores into primordial caves. The petrifying atmosphere in the mall is a dark echo of the scenario in *High-Rise*. Without the complex play of light in *High-Rise,* the lighting arrays in *Kingdom Come* are artificially controlled, glowing and dimming with a set pace*. '*Somewhere was the rhythmic murmur of deep water, the same tides that my father had sailed as he circled the globe. […] someone had switched on the wave machine' (263). The 'erratic current' is strictly controlled by what is soon revealed to be a wave machine under the manipulation of two engineers outside Holiday Inn. The water in its successive waves sends on shore piles of wreckage, debris of beer cans, and eventually reveals the dead body of a Pakistani barrister. The rich medley of forms, mixed miasma, painted bodies and broken furniture in *High-Rise* are united by a military rhythm in *Kingdom Come*. Unlike the residents of *High-Rise* who organize themselves into small units and clans occupying the hidden corners of the architecture and creating a poetic of material forms, the consumers in *Kingdom Come* unify into a homogeneous tribe under Tom Carradine's military control. Governed by 'strict rationing system' (262), there is no looting and vandalization. Hostages are released at a controlled pace, while those who remain take turns to clean the shops and the floors. The scene is a flipped recount of the daily activity of shopping.

After Cruise dies, the praying supporters make an altar with his photograph, and wheel his body around on a tour, in the hope that the merchandise will revive him. The shopping mall is used as a 'house of totems', a sacred space for worship. Maxted examines the crowd as an anthropologist, and cleans the blood stains off the ground, as if completing a ritual. In the

finale, the agitated townspeople occupy the mall and sacrifice Dr. Maxted in front of the 'household gods' (263) of commodities. In the realm of sacred rituals, bloodshed is not immoral. Rather, it is a collective play that holds the community together, who are 'players' in tacit allegiance to a supreme order higher than reality. In his book *Homo Ludens*, which has informed neo-avant-garde movements, anthropologist Johan Huizinga (1938) argues for the play nature of civilization. Play, for Huizinga, happens in an autonomous site separate from reality, where a particular set of rules are implemented. Despite the make-believe and impractical nature, it is carried out in all seriousness and dedication. Religious ritual is a form of play in a dedicated space in order to enact a higher, inscrutable cosmic order. In *Kingdom Come*, the shopping mall also functions as a consecrated space to enact a perfect second order. The bricolage of commodities creates a liminal passage to the revelation of a deity.

Consumer and sports culture also creates a bricolage of signs that evokes identification with an abstract order. In cap and shirt, Pearson disguises as part of the sports club and passes through the congested zone on sports weekends. The sports stadium in the mall is a pronounced game space where identity is fabricated through special clothes, equipment, and mannerisms. Both sports and shopping involve a ritualized, symbolic repertoire of experiences (Dunning, et al, 2014). Consumption is a ritualistic act of compulsion, performed not to an instrumental end, but to meet an inward need for an abstract order.

In his conversation with William Sangster, a high school mathematics teacher, Pearson articulates the purely economic logic of consumerism who claims that his project with Cruise is merely a sales strategy. Sangster plays a theologist-mathematician who, repeating Markham's 'mathematician's look at God', lays out the theological framework underpinning consumer culture: 'When we buy something we unconsciously believe we've been given a present' (102). '[The consumers] were immigrants to a new country, already naturalized, citizens of the shopping mall, the free electorate of the cash till and the loyalty card' (271). As I argued in the last chapter, the spirit of the gift lurks in consumer culture and the gift exchange with God underpins Hobbes's sovereign state which is later taken up in Schmitt. Both the archaic society of Plutarch and the infrastructural community of the modern state are a totalized

society of freedom, underpinned by the 'bivalent' structure of freedom-obligation innate to the gift.

The new consumer-fascist politics of Metro-Centre retains a backward look at the unrealized enlightenment ideals. Both fascism and consumer capitalism are a 'redemptive ideology' (103) at the failure of liberalism. The consumerist empire is a neo-fascist state, a renewed attempt to remedy the failed enlightenment project and the very attempt to fix the apparatus ends up perpetrating its operation. Maxted's therapy is indistinguishable from the psychopathy he identifies, in the same way that Pearson's investigation is indistinguishable from the commitment of the crime. As Pearson later finds out, his father has gone through the exact same experience as him before he dies. Like the young Pearson, his dad has also been disguising himself as a member of the sports club, in order to investigate and prevent their violent crimes, before he is taken as a nationalist and shot dead in the previous uprising in the mall. The cyclic repetition of the murderous events hardly does any real damage to the shopping mall, only to halt the growth of its turnover for one year, in the same way that the revolutions in Chelsea Marina only manage to temporarily halt its cyclic renovation.

The last chapter of *Kingdom Come* is titled 'solar cult'. The metaphor of the sun, harkening back to Britain's imperial past, points at the colonial, expansive aspect in the proliferation of gated enclaves beneath their appearance of enclosure and stasis. Although inner Londoners consume high arts and advanced forms of cultural capital, while the football hooligans are seen as vulgar and animalistic, Ballard's two novels equalize them as futile travelers in circular mobility, whose identities rely on eradicating invented enemies. The shock therapy they prescribe to amend the infrastructure only generate glitches and *punctum* without fundamentally altering its way of ordering. The mobile elites in *Millennium People* campaign against international travel, while going on compulsive exiles to exotic suburbs, without discovering anything new. They are not too far from Ballard's half-conscious urban *flaneurs* who are 'making a whole sort of Christopher Columbus-like discoveries about the nature of floors, windows, carpets, and the like, because often, behind the most trivial things, lie enormous mysteries'. The great sea explorer in search of a distant suburbia is also an unconscious colonizer. In the 'redemptive ideology' of consumer fascism in *Kingdom Come*,

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what is naturalized and overlooked is the structural violence against racial minorities. Both the middle class and working class's anti-capitalist and anti-globalization protests that draw on the avant-garde posture end up perpetrating a circular mobility that buttresses an expanding global network and precludes the encounter with real alterity.

Wedging linguistic wars armed with Marxist theory or reviving fascist regime, the revolutions in Chelsea Marina and Brooklands are enclosed in an aestheticized, gamified space and look back at modernism's divisive politics and self-defeating logic. The self-defeating revolutions in the two novels witness how the avant-garde posture and rhetoric is recuperated into a 'formalist politics'. The avant-garde, in its generic and theoretical mode, is a flattened, empty, flappy posture that points at no future, a pan-provocation, pan-revolution, pan-transgression discourse without a core message. As I mentioned in chapter two, after the failure of modernism, 'disillusioned are forced into a poetic that perennially contemplates its existence as void form, empty of any Utopian strength - in short, an aesthetic that celebrates its own failure' (Puglisi, 2013, p132).

Ballard's fictions repeatedly describe such periodical resuscitation of the moribund modernist project. From a personified Brookland town we get a glimpse of the avant-garde's ghostly suburban posture:

> The suburbs were coming alive again. A malignant fringe had done its damage, terrifying a blameless minority of Asian and east Europeans. But a corpse had revived and sat up, and was demanding breakfast. The moribund motorway towns, the people of the Heathrow plain, were positioning themselves on the runway, ready to take flight (193).

As suburbia can be called into being in new historical conditions, there are many ways we can bring the avant-garde back to life. One way is a nostalgic revisit, and what I would call 'resuscitating a corpse', which attempts to revive the concept by adopting a narrative of haunting. An example is Hal Foster's (1994) conceptualization of the avant-garde as a traumatic hole in the symbolic order of dominant culture that compulsively and involuntarily repeats itself. When the avant-garde is framed as a spectre, a structural lack, or void impossible to pin down, it still operates in a destructive and formless mode devoid of normative meaning. Rather than illuminating the unconscious, the underground and the fringe of the society, it can conceal real social structures and historical conditions.

The avant-garde can be resuscitated when the capital demands expansion and replication in a freer but totalized apparatus. This is when 'suburbia is coming alive again, demanding breakfast'. Its endeavour, under the banner of productivism or independent ideological critique, can be self-defeating and replicate structural violence against 'blameless minority'. Pushed to an extreme, it is a generic and replicable formula for destructive politics and aesthetized war.

Another way the avant-garde comes back is through what Mauro calls 'post-avant-garde collectivism' or 'invisible committee' located in sites that are termed 'laboratory', suspended zones and separate aesthetic spheres. Through disavowing the avant-garde and denouncing the alienated modernist hero, these new forms of collectivism draw on notions of formlessness as a way of resistance. With broad-stroked slogans of anti-globalization and anti-capitalism, such politics celebrates the instantaneity and prevalence of resistance. Conjuring a dead spirit or resorting to notions of spectrality, void, invisibility and formlessness, reinvention or denouncement of the avant-garde still risks reiterating an abstract posture that can be conveniently recuperated into structural reconstitution. There is a tendency in formalist politics to immobilize dominant culture into a monolithic whole on the one hand, and on the other hand, through an arbitrary designation of the other, it makes niche experience more marketable. The two ways that the avant-garde come back reiterate the dichotomy between centre and peripheral, structure and formlessness in notions of heterotopia and liminality, which Levine and Hetherington have debunked. By conceptualizing global community as a bounded network and illuminating hidden, heightened forms of control in liminal and heterotopic space, Ballard's work can help tackle a new set of challenges and opportunities we witness now. I will talk more about this in the conclusion.

Conclusion: Suburbia and the Future

This thesis attempts to illuminate a path.

On this path, we may conceptualize how art and reality, literature and geography interact with each other. I have looked back at Ballard by joining Rosalind Krauss's look back at Walter Benjamin and contextualized Ballard's work in the twilight zone of a postindustrial and postmedium landscape**.** In Krauss's revision, art's postmodern condition is already incipient in Benjamin's utopian prognosis that photography in its age of technological reproduction can bring about what she calls a wholesale transformation of modern art that operates in a structuralist, relational field. Analyzing the grid form, the infrastructural basis of modern art's visual field, Krauss identifies its 'bivalent' structure that reconciles the scientific with the mythological.

Krauss's analysis has pointed out the twofold potentials in this paradigm shift, within which I have tried to make sense of the contradictory terms Ballard's work is stuck in between: utopia / dystopia, modernist/postmodernist, avant-garde / mainstream. I relate what Krauss perceives to be modern art's ground-zero working station to Ballard's series of (sub)urban places and relate artistic practice with place making. Ballard's speculative fiction is an invented medium that interacts with various forms of arts and brings to light an alternative genealogy of myth-making, world-building literature. His 'flatness' draws attention to the constructivist method with which we 'bricolage' into being a series of what I call 'postmedium places' and various form of 'suburbia': motorways, high-rises, and gated communities both in urban centres, near airports and attached to the motorways.

Ballard's suburbia, a bounded whole in a network, temporally interlinks modernism/postmodernism and spatially lies in the interstices of urban infrastructures. His work dramatizes a banalized version of vanguardism that is recuperated into everyday spaces and practices. In retrospect, the definitive act of the avant-garde is 'sculpting motion', which assists the production of infrastructural places that direct the motion of a multitude into a sequence. The aleatory order and contingent flux, akin to the photographic visual field of modern art, calls for the apocalyptic moment of stoppage and disruption to generate meaning. The avant-garde is far from dead and finished; it constantly generates 'outsides', bounded spheres for experiments with alternative ordering. To say it is not dead means to see it in terms of both-and, to understand the

deeper mechanism that unites its seemingly opposing faces, its utopian and dystopian tendencies. Its progressive politics expressed in formlessness is undergirded by formalism, its openness comes with enclosure, and its collective game asks for destruction and sacrifice.

My reading on the one hand pinpoints avant-gardes' repeated recuperation into new cultural paradigms and economic structures and on the other hand acknowledge the positive meaning in various in-between moments when new technologies create inchoate intellectual landscapes and twilight zones. Ballard's backward look illuminates a path where we shift from object to process, nature to structure, and reality to embodied fiction. We are collectively moving to a future whose 'raised horizons' are both revealing and concealing. As we continue to depart from the Cartesian binary, new technologies continue to offer us possibilities to remake reality as a construct of the mind. It does so by constantly creating ground-zeros where mind, body and ethics are liquidized as modular, editable, and remappable units. This account offers a relief to the pessimism in the 'death of modernism' and opens the possibilities of change and intervention into the world we inhabit now. Examining the legacy of modernism in urban landscape, Ballard's works are on the one hand driven by a scientific impulse: reshuffling a set of basic forms and geometries, they are a cartography of the fast-paced, multi-faceted technological landscape in search of formal principles. They are on the other hand mythological: with an apocalyptic narrative, it casts an archaeologist and anthropologist's backward look at the constellation of ephemeral traces of the present and organizes the random flux of experiences into private mythologies. Fiction and mythology are used as a linguistic fabric to serve our search for meaning, sense of dwelling and political agency.

On this path we need two modes of perceptions. One for poetics, one for history, one for form, one for contingency. One for paradigm shifts and one for interstitial moments of hope in a piece of broken object. The tension between 'poetics' and 'history', as Michael Holquist notes, runs through Mikhail Bakhtin's work:

> Poetics, as usually understood, is the study of figures that recur, and as such poetics is opposed to the manifold differences that are the essence of history. In so far as poetics addresses static shapes, is it not then a spatial science? How can it coexist with history, the most radically temporal form of knowledge? (2002, p106)

Benjamin's dialectical image can be seen as a reconciliation between poetics and history. In

Adorno's critique, Benjamin's dialectics casts a petrifying look at history and naturalizes historical events into an image. However, in Benjamin's petrifying, non-progressive outlook, history acquires a life. It can be contemplated in still moments and read retrospectively in formal terms. History manifests both temporal and spatial/poetic dimensions. Ballard's so-called historiography of the twentieth century also composes a dialectical image that allows us to look back at it and bring it to new light.

The speak about 'poetic history' or 'historical poetics' is to understand 'form as contingent' or 'contingency as form'. Reconciling the tension between poetics and history, we may reconcile historicism with formalism in reading a work of art. A work of art both resonates with concrete historical contexts and has its autonomous and constructed forms of organization. Ballard's poetic form that seems to resist change and thetic reading is intimately interacting with history and urban reality. It can be used to re-read history and reconceptualize space. Taking creative energy from the grid, he has invented a 'static', non-developmental narrative form where meaning is trapped in its own seriality. With an enclosed structure and an internally generative principle, Ballard's work is both coherent, recognizable, and imbued with unreadable moments. As Luckhurst rightly notes, Ballard's unreadability is connected to the difficulty of placing him and urges us to reconsider fixed, historicist categories. Ballard's unreadability points at a moment when the linear trajectory of history is interrupted and urges us to contemplate its poetic dimension. Identifying avant-garde art's repeated intersection with social reality, for instance, is not to admit defeat. Quite on the contrary, it allows us to attend more carefully to the danger and possibilities in contingent moments of departure / recuperation.

While Ballard's serialized work is repetitive and mirrors the way (sub)urban landscape reshuffles a set of basic forms and geometries, his oeuvre also manifests a trajectory. The carnival of forms and crisscrossing routes in his urban trilogies and seaside resorts eventually develop into a monotonous rhythm and a concentric topology of the crowd. The painterly appeal and psychedelic light dissipate in smokes of gunpower. His waning aesthetics traces a trajectory in urban morphology and teases out the dark implications in the way we organize life and build communities around infrastructures. It helps us conceptualize urban places in terms of their actuality and virtuality. It also cautions us against the 'formalist politics' that revels in

pan- transgressive discourses and the way that it might breed abstract, senseless violence.

His unreadability and flatness draw attention to the constructedness of his own medium, and thus sheds light on the material and technological processes behind urban places and infrastructures. Places are man-made and fragile. Their centre, border, structure, and rhythm rely on ritualistic repetitions of human action and artificial maintenance. In their poetic mode parallel to its functional mode, they can be reordered and reshuffled in a way that does more justice to its heterogeneous users/addressees. Unveiling the improvisational nature of urban places opens them up to alternative ordering by heterogenous subjects. In this new outlook, history, art and place remerge as 'infrastructures'. So does culture. As Ballard's infrastructural text and infrastructural places beg rereading, culture also needs to be read as an infrastructure with both relatively stable ways of ordering and possibilities of change. Rather than reducing culture to a hegemonic, repressive structure and searching for heterotopic outsides, we may displace the centre-peripheral, utopia-dystopia paradigm and conceive culture as an autopoetic system with manifold differences and recurring forms, with multiple players and dominant figures. Convoluted collisions between forms might bring change. Rather than projecting a new future that lies outside the vague term 'capitalism', we may interrogate the intricate ways that cultural systems are ordered and seek political possibility to modify them.

From Non-Place to New Place – A Case Study

By illuminating a path, I would like to look at the future and examine what I call the 'suburban posture' in contemporary times, especially urban regeneration projects that seek to make a 'non-place' a 'new place', to imagine new futures in suburbia. Ballard's work that repeatedly dramatizes these scenarios can help us debunk a few myths. One of the myths is the antithetical 'non-place' / 'heterotopia' notions of a place that overemphasize its confining / emancipatory aspects. The government-led urban regeneration project and multicultural hubs/laboratories often go hand in hand. As urban regeneration projects constantly renovate the peripheral and fringe, cultural hubs and laboratories often become a 'consecrated place' of cultural symbols. These practices might end up blocking an analytic insight into the actual forces at play in cultural networks and forestall rather than facilitate political change.

I will take the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, situated in London Stratford, as a case study. Echoing the Festival of Britain and the Southbank Project, two previous attempts to rebrand Britain as a modern state, the Olympic Park is the most recent regenerative project that has left a legacy. Echoing Ballard's fictional suburbs superimposing Thames valley towns, the park is built on the marshy areas of River Lea. Developed for the 2012 Summer Olympic, it is intended to leave a legacy of a revitalized neighborhood that incorporates nature and sports facilities to boost a healthy lifestyle for the residents. Occupied by West Ham Stadium, East Bank cultural centre, Westfield shopping centre, the park is now, as stated in a London travel blog, a 'versatile recreational space and a gathering place for both Londoners and visitors'.

Noting how luxury flats have replaced affordable housing, Oliver Wainwright (2022, [no pagination]) calls the scheme a 'massive betrayal'. Tim Burrows (2017, [no pagination]), writing for *The Guardian*, asks 'legacy, what legacy'? The heritage-led approach has paved way for a consumer-led gentrification. The production of natural and cultural myths continues to draw on the avant-garde posture. As Burrows (2017) points out, 'the 'village' still feels new, and oddly placeless – you could be in any new development in Melbourne or Lyon – with streets names like Olympic Park Avenue, Champions Way and Victory Square carrying an air of empty bombast'. The 'non-place' feeling to the renovated area is married with resuscitated military vanguardism. The renovative project is intended to perform a gymnastic of suturing: bridging the affluent west and the impoverished east, integrating nature and sports into local cultural life, forging partnership between public and private sectors. The sutured landscape hides its historical and mechanical process: its acts of excavation, dislocation, and superimposition. While the motorways, trains stations, shopping malls, the twin towers in Victory Plaza with private roof gardens -- add to the 'non-place' look, the vibrant cultural centre of East Bank gives the impression of a free heterotopia. Located at the heart of the park, it hosts a rich collection of cultural icons – BBC music studios, Sadler's Wells, V&A, UAL, UCL. Their starkly contrasting architectural styles intensifies the futuristic effect. The future of a 'global hub' is embodied in a disjunct collage of visual images.

The heterotopia of East Bank is nested within and circumcised by the bent of motorways and railway tracks. The cultural quarter is a designated area for multinational

collaboration and public-private partnership. Departing from traditional models of the 'suburb' that is affiliated to the urban centre, the park is a self-contained, concentrated node. It focuses on edges, frontiers and porous borders that facilitate the movement of labor, resources, and capital. Its vast open space helps generate new relations and pathways. Patrolled by security guards, the 'gated community' are highly mobile: students, visitors, mallgoers, and football fans swarm in and out of the area in rush hours. Contrasting the unceasing flow of the motorway, the area is a mobile haven for pedestrians, the most potent expression of which is the omnipresent roller-skaters dexterously crisscrossing their way through an amorphous crowd. Meanwhile, the place is a 'walled city' hard to navigate for outsiders and once inside, it is difficult to find the way out.

Standing next to a landmark architecture – 'ArcelorMittal Orbit', 'a tangled rollercoaster, only without a ride' (Wainwright, 2022, [no pagination]), is the main teaching building of UCL east campus – Marshgate built by Stanton Williams, also the designer company of Sainsbury Laboratory in Cambridge. As Rowan Moore (2023, [no pagination]) writes in his Guardian review, while the 'cuboid shapes' and 'concrete fins' of the exterior gives a formidable look of a 'learning factory or a high security knowledge facility', it 'doesn't give much clue to the drama and complexity of the interior'. Terraces, corridors, stairs, lifts and elevators surrounding a full-height atrium playfully direct mobility back to the centre. Sharing a neo-brutalist ethos, the broad column and sturdy structure are built to last; the generous volume of empty space counters the principle of austerity. Reshuffling a set of basic materials, the building balances transience with permanence and offsets sturdiness with subtle change of texture. The glass panels, extended balconies, projecting bays and floor-to-ceiling windows create a highly imageable, multilayered, and transparent space that admits the light in. It both offers varying perspectives of the interior from multiple viewpoints and gives a panoramic view of the outside world. Like Ballard's Metro-Centre shopping mall, Marshgate is a factory and prison, theatre and playground, a networked space and a bounded whole. It is both inward looking and outward looking, inviting both centrifugal and centripetal perspectives / experiences.

Echoing banners of 'disruptive thinking' printed along the road, Marshgate is a disruptive architecture that articulates UCL east's 'myth of the future' by transcending

disciplinary segregations and by opening its facilities, activities, and services to entrepreneurial models and cultural industries. In the free-range factory of Marshgate, what is branded as 'creativity' and 'collaboration' have become passwords for productivity and marketization. The transversal nature of interdisciplinary institutions is assisted by the architectural design. Its working spaces are reorganized into 'labs', 'hubs', 'boxes', 'studios', 'fabrication workshops', and vertical neighborhoods to encourage creativity, collaboration, and cross-fertilization of ideas. On the second floor an immense 'refectory' (its Latin root meaning 'to remake / restore') is dedicated to socializing and rest. Riding a new wave of formalism, academia becomes a two-faced creative game that suspends practicality yet feeds back to productivity, a game that seems to be 'outside' reality but is ultimate embedded within the knowledge-based economy, a game that reiterates the twinned impulses of the avant-garde.

Despite its flux and fun, Moore (2023) suggests that Marshgate's unbending spaces are unlikely to offer the 'serendipitous vivacity' it has promised. Considering Marshgate is only the first in a plot of four soon to be built, he speculates that 'perhaps unconsciously, Stanton Williams seem to have reacted to the collective vagueness by making it more defensive and introspective than it needs to be'. The V&A's building, for Moore, is 'seemingly ready to spring from its pointed feet'. The 'bulky and workmanlike' facades of The London College of Fashion are too much like an office block. The Olympic Park is what Ballard would call an amusement park with modernism's last flings and slips of tongue. The landscape is too reminiscent of what he calls 'the new world of aviation, radio, public health and mass consciousness' that soon welcomed the dictators and turned a dystopia. Its modern shiny look, dreams of flight and creativity, openness and diversity are secretly bounded by productivity, austerity, and paranoia. With encircled mobility and totalized diversity, it expresses our twinned impulses for freedom and control, science and mythology.

The message here, I must clarify, is not to adopt an anti-urban, anti-capitalist stance and declare these projects are 'doomed' or 'dystopias'. Rather, we are co-inhabiting with these spaces and participating their uncertain future. Since 'all utopias have their dark side', we may ask how formlessness coheres and where dreams of flight are grounded. When modernism can be 'switched on' and suburbia can 'sit up and demand breakfast' in new situations, we need to be more attentive to the recurrent topologies in our (sub)urban landscape. Delineating their

patterns and differences and articulating their hidden dynamics and unseen registers have

serious implications for understanding and reinventing suburban politics.

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