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## Concrete Reality: The Posthuman Landscapes of J.G. Ballard

Mark Hausmann

*Chapman University*, [mhausmann9@gmail.com](mailto:mhausmann9@gmail.com)

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Concrete Reality: The Posthuman Landscapes of J.G. Ballard

A Thesis by

Mark Hausmann

Chapman University

Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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December 2016


Committee in charge:

Morgan Read-Davidson, M.A./M.F.A.

Logan Esdale, Ph.D.

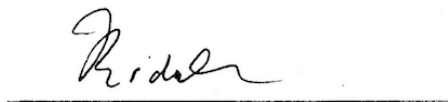
David Paddy, Ph.D.

The thesis of Mark Hausmann is approved.



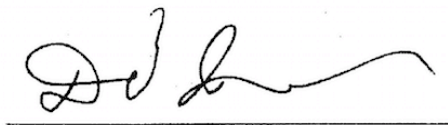
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Morgan Read-Davidson, M.A./M.F.A.



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Logan Esdale, Ph.D.



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## ABSTRACT

### Concrete Reality: The Posthuman Landscapes of J.G. Ballard

by Mark Hausmann

While the fiction of J.G. Ballard has been primarily explored through postmodern criticism, his narratives and settings predict major issues concerning the contemporary discourse of posthumanism. His texts explore the escalating economic, social, and ecological crises converging within the material conditions of human urbanization and late capitalism. Nearly all of Ballard's novels are as much about locations undergoing a crisis as they are about individuals or communities coming to embrace some extended period of human hysteria. His characters in *The Drought*, *Concrete Island*, and *Super-Cannes*, each progress through ecologically and socially alienating surroundings which invigorate them to act against classical humanism's hegemonic and anthropocentric tendencies. By applying Henri Lefebvre's spatial concept of "abstract space" to Ballard's range of urban settings, this thesis investigates how Ballard's early, middle, and late, novels continually put materiality, humanism, and technological landscapes, through different ecological and geopolitical crises in order to deconstruct a number of cultural and ideological concerns posthumanist studies seek to address.

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## **Introduction**

Cities construct humans just as much as humans continue to construct cities. In the fiction of J.G. Ballard, this continuum is framed within simultaneously ideal and devastating circumstances. His surreal works stage the radical possibilities and frailties of human subjects embodying their physical world at the outset of the twenty-first century. Commended for his ability to prophesize, Ballard sustained a passion for dissecting subtle catastrophes of Western culture. His enthusiasm to put materiality, humanism, and technological landscapes through ecological and geopolitical crisis marks his commitment to deconstructing many of the same repressed cultural and political concerns posthumanist studies are addressing. His novels collide head-on with the central question of what it means to be human in an age of global capitalism.

Posthumanism gives contemporary readers of Ballard's work an essential theoretical foundation for approaching Ballard's themes of human subjectivity and the decline of the West. Humanism, as viewed by posthumanists, is identified as a Man-centered, Eurocentric paradigm, which upholds human progress, both materially and intellectually, as the paramount objective of all human existence since antiquity (Braidotti 13-16; Pepperell 159). Notions of posthumanism have arisen in recent decades to destabilize humanism's narrowed vision of humanity, its progress, and its ongoing political and ecological consequences. In centering on human subjectivity in crisis, Ballard similarly maps out the anthropocentric issues our age can no longer ignore. Yet, rather than provide concise orthodox solutions, he uses fiction to publicly experiment with the complexity of acknowledging productive qualities within human crises and civic

disruptions. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, in his 2013 book on the rise of posthuman subjects in literature, *The New Human in Literature*, claims, “literature thrives much better on apocalyptic and dystopian scenarios than on visions of improvement” (73). While Thomsen’s claim leads us to believe fiction, at its best, forces readers to confront alternatively realities, each of Ballard’s works further complicates how literature can socially represent disaster, entropy, and dystopia. As Ballard puts it in his 1977 essay, “Cataclysms and Dooms,” writing within the catastrophe genre “represents a constructive and positive act by the imagination, rather than a negative one, an attempt to confront a patently meaningless universe by challenging it at its own game” (209). Extending Thomsen’s point, Ballard maintains writers prescribe “visions of improvement” through their depiction of how subjects confront ontological and material crises. He engages this aim through his deconstructive approaches to the theme of human suffering.

Throughout Ballard’s work, humans are dared to decode their place within variably dangerous and disaster-struck cities. In such key novels as *The Drought*, *Concrete Island*, and *Super-Cannes*, his uncanny descriptions of urban spaces defamiliarize settings most familiar to his over-habituated subjects and readers: massive cities, suburbs, freeway systems, shopping centers, gated communities, and the concept of home; he shows us places we only think we know. In his most famous 1962 essay, “Which Way to Inner Space?” he demands an increase in the responsibility on the part of readers to decode both science fiction and urban life (198). It is here that Ballard first defines his exploratory concept of “inner space” and poses his most famous contention: “The only truly alien planet is Earth” (197). On Ballard’s career-length use of defamiliarization, and this specific excerpt, Ballard scholar David Paddy proposes the urban world of late



capitalism in crisis that Ballard depicts is “made strange by Ballard’s special merger of Surrealism and science fiction [...] so that we may look at it afresh” (30). Similarly, Toby Litt observes, “Ballard manages to see what we can’t” (viii). Read alongside each other, these claims frame Ballard’s vision of literature in a way that challenges humans to reevaluate and experience current the political crises of our contemporary world encoded in the materiality everywhere around us. In doing so, he urges his subjects and readers through the Freudian concept of “anamnesis,” or a “working through” of repressed or traumatic memories (Miccoli 53). The concrete urban realities Ballard sets up again and again interrogate anthropocentrism and classical humanism, by exposing urban space to be entirely constructed by Western consumerism and, as Paddy emphasizes throughout in his book, *The Empires of J.G. Ballard*, long histories of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and neoliberalism. All of these contextual facets situate Ballard’s narratives and settings well within the current discourse of posthumanism.

Ballard’s urban landscapes are especially ripe for posthuman theory to investigate further. His texts explore escalating economic, social, and ecological crises that converge within the material conditions of cities and capitalism. Nearly all of Ballard’s novels are as much about locations undergoing a crisis as they are about individuals or communities coming to embrace some extended period of hysteria brought on by open-ended futures. His characters in *The Drought*, *Concrete Island*, and *Super-Cannes*, each progress through ecologically and socially alienating surroundings which invigorate them towards taking action against hegemonic or anthropocentric tendencies. In assessing urban space as the propagator of these widespread cultural stances, these three novels in turn demonstrate radical posthumanist notions surrounding issues of materiality, global ethics,

and new radical subjectivities. These novels exemplify narratives of subjects confronting the spatial obstacles that face the arrival of a posthuman age.

### **The Production of Space and Its Users**

Two major links between Ballard and posthumanism's examination of materiality lie in the notions most central to Henri Lefebvre's 1974 text, *The Production of Space*. While urging humans to decode the everyday spaces made by capitalism's grand narrative, Lefebvre supplies readers with theoretical concepts and historicizing content that can be used to analyze Ballard's work. Most importantly, he lends us the belief that everyday users of "abstract space," or objectively shaped and therefore commodified space, should decode their spatial context (Lefebvre 50). As examples, the technological cities and communities of Ballard's main body of work demonstrate places where space and bodies have once been objectified, in the name of national financial gains and conservative societal stability. But as Paddy acknowledges, Ballard also chooses his settings, or sense of "literary geography," carefully (25); his choosing places like central London, the Mediterranean coast, the suburbs of Shepperton, Shanghai, the United States, Central Africa, or an island in the Pacific, all come with inseparable historical contexts. Ballard's cities and suburbs in crisis establish settings where urban subjects are forced to question their solitary identity and role within humanity's past, present, and future. His settings present human landscapes unable to repress inhuman activities, which forces characters to dislodge themselves from their urban contexts and embody alternatives to the imperial and homogenizing objectives of humanism.

In this historic Marxist study of social, mental, and abstract space, Lefebvre argues that the history of urban space is ultimately the history of capitalism (49-53). In doing so, he defines the concept of abstract space as not just the product of technologically developed land in contrast to natural space, but as space operating objectively, as an instrument of economic activity and commodification (50). He traces the conceptual history of the abstract space cities contain, pointing out how specific religious sites and institutions formed the original sources of towns. Spatial relationships among these locations spawned interconnecting lanes and roads, which spanned the distances between peasant communities. Early spatial network spurred the interrelationship of specific places offering capital, or “the world of commodities” (53); from here the networks of lanes and roads between urban centers developed over time alongside rises in “major productive entities” and the transportation technologies of “motorways, airports, and information lattices” (53). Lefebvre’s history of urban abstract space explains how the formation of cities runs parallel to the rise of the economic interests of Western Europe toward nation-states.

Not only did space and natural resources become commodified, but so too did human subjects and their distribution in space (Lefebvre 55). In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti speaks out against this phenomenon: “[T]he opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction between the human and other species when it comes to profiting from them. Seeds, plants, animals, and bacteria fit into this logic of insatiable consumption” (63). Together, Braidotti’s ethical critique of capitalism’s subliminal efforts and Lefebvre’s history of spatial commodities extend each other. Rampant commodification, of all forms

of materiality, is at once the visible organizing purpose of cities, and its underlying process of devitalizing space and subjects.

The degree to which urban subjects can disassociate or defamiliarize themselves enough to “read space” against its facade cohesively is the other important topic spanning Ballard, Lefebvre, and posthumanism (Lefebvre 142). Whereas posthumanists urge humans to invert or fully deconstruct their concept of being human and humanism—so as to approach it afresh—Lefebvre urges his readers to decode their own urban surroundings, in order to assess its potential to signify ethical activity. Like the human/city continuum that opens this article, Lefebvre comments on the how space dictates human activity as much as humans can dictate how space is generally to be used:

Activity in space is restricted by that space; space decides what activities may occur, but even this ‘decision’ has limits placed upon it. Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order – and hence also a certain disorder [...] Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes, distances to be covered. It is produced with this purpose in mind. [...] This space [however] was *produced* before being *read*; nor was it produced in order to be read and grasped, but rather in order to be *lived* by people with bodies and lives in their own particular urban context. (143)

Here Lefebvre sounds quite like Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which only binds the necessity to discuss Ballard and Lefebvre further. For Lefebvre, to live in an abstract space is to perpetuate its preexisting, objective purposes. This lines up nicely with how Freud argues how humans negotiate their own inclusion within civilization, which Freud states is defined by its purity in contrast to the behavior of animals and the

susceptibility to forces of nature, its use of a variety of tools, and its depreciation of individual liberty in favor of conservatism (Freud 27-33). It is Lefebvre's criticism towards the mental and physical prohibitions enforced by abstract space and Freud's limiting definition of human civilization, which the efforts of posthumanism seek to combat. Likewise, while Freud casts authoritarian visions of modern life in urbanized centers, Ballard sees human civilization's defining characteristics as topics to spend a whole career destabilizing. Ballard constantly admitted Freud's ideas were as much an influence on him as continental surrealism; in his autobiography, *Miracles of Life*, he equates his discovery of both sources of inspiration as "a stick of bombs that fell in front of me and destroyed all the bridges that I was hesitating to cross" (120). His metaphor of demolition only accentuates the subversive motives behind working through the latent or repressed qualities of material reality further, which Lefebvre supports. But while Lefebvre argues space is produced before it is conceptually read, he also maintains that a space is still preconceived to perpetuate some preexisting "urban context" among its subjects (143). In this way, he seems to position abstract urban space as both objectively designed and conservatively blind to the potential meditative qualities experienced by its users following its construction.

The idea of the citizens or subjects of a space being referred to as its users poses another of Lefebvre's more revolutionary points for discussion. In Marxist fashion, during his postulating of the origin of cities, Lefebvre spends some time discussing the unequal distribution of power between those authorized to design material space and "the silence of the 'users' of [that] space" (51). In doing so, he poses two crucial questions: "Why do they allow themselves to be manipulated in ways so damaging to their spaces

and their daily life without embarking on massive revolts? Why is protest left to ‘enlightened’ and hence elite, groups who are in any case largely exempt from these manipulations?” (51). Here, Lefebvre connects issues of class and environmentalism to the inherent design of abstract space and its rampant commodification of space, and its local or global consumers. The most available reason behind why users of a space, or those who have bought into abstract space, do not revolt against abstract space stems from a discussion of materiality.

Essentially, urban spaces have the ability to appear monolithic, to appear as the only viable option when we consider how some spaces occupy more favorable climates or economic security than others. This element of desirability of space feeds into the commodification of space and bodies. The more desirable opportunities a space offers, the more people will be drawn to it; in Lefebvre’s text “the Mediterranean Coast”, which serves as the setting for both *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes*, signifies the most idyllic location and climate (58; 353). However, Lefebvre, like Ballard, suggests that the opportunity, desires, and stability that urban centers altogether signify may be far more manipulative and narrow-minded than people identify. In critiquing the passivity of the human users of a space, Lefebvre offers no solace, highlighting how working class people seem to leave protesting the conditions of space to “enlightened” groups, of which he appears to be very skeptical (51). Yet, Lefebvre falls into the same pitfall as most posthumanist theorists, by theorizing how theory does not result in action. He refers to political charged intelligentsia as “mere wordmills,” furthering the notion of a great divide between theorizing discourse and tangible action (51). This idea is directly taken up by Braidotti’s type of materialist posthumanism. In challenging this sense of

powerlessness of the users of space, Lefebvre furthers his definition of abstract space to include its demand for homogeneity—and ultimately capital hegemony—among social and global relations.

### **The Use of the Posthuman**

Posthumanism is a unifying, interdisciplinary field of critical discourse addressing human subjects in our technological age, by radically reevaluating humanism and its political and ecological connections to capitalistic hegemony. It focuses on the desires and anxieties of the present as much as on those of the future (Thomsen 224). To enter the discourse of the posthuman is to be faced with radical claims about material embodiment, anti-humanistic debates, global ethics, political action, and historic perspectives on information and cybernetics. While Ballard tackles the more socio-political and ecological aspects of posthumanism, it is impossible to separate these topics from changes in human subjectivity caused by technological landscapes and advancements. Braidotti's unique concepts of nomadic subjectivity, neo-primitivism, and the zoe, and the posthuman usage of Freud's concept of anamnesis, are all valuable to today's critics of Ballard's work. All of these concepts operate well within Lefebvre's conviction that users of abstract space should decode and ultimately contest the spatial and economic contexts that drive human development. Viewing *The Drought*, *Concrete Island*, and *Super-Cannes* through these specific posthuman concepts nuances their theoretical importance and highlights how Ballard's use of setting parallels his experimentation with posthuman themes.

Braidotti is very critical of how posthumanism is represented in media and scholarly works. On her personal tenets of posthumanism, Braidotti in her text, *The Posthuman*, offers:

Very much a philosophy of the outside, of open spaces and embodied enactments, nomadic posthuman thought yearns for a qualitative leap out of the familiar, trusting the untapped possibilities opened by our historical location in the technologically mediated world of today. It is a way of being worthy of our times, to increase our freedom and understanding of the complexities we inhabit in a world that is neither anthropocentric nor anthropomorphic, but rather geo-political, ecosophical and proudly *zoe*-centered. (94)

This quotation best represents the intersections of posthuman concepts we will apply to Ballard's work. For Braidotti, articulating and applying theories of the posthuman takes radical creativity and an awareness of present kairos. Simultaneously, in asking of us to rethink our own human identities, she urges us to be "nomadic," prompting us to signify any overly solid sense of self with habituated laziness and potentially dangerous ideological complacency (100). Calling for increasingly inclusive and complex subjectivities that look outward reflexively, Braidotti argues, "A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others, by removing the obstacle of self-centered individualism" (49-50). As an example, Ballard explores her idea of nomadic subjectivity by forcing many of his subjects to reassess their psychological connection to urban space. His characters struggle to integrate themselves within wider ecological



contexts beyond their urban space. In doing so, they unsettle their identities once founded in humanism.

By questioning the past actions and binaries which once defined humanism, Braidotti means to perpetuate an ideological paradigm shift from that of a Man or human-centered world, towards a chiefly decentralized world or “zoe-egalitarianism” (60). Braidotti defines “zoe” as “a generative power that flows across all species” and non-human life forms, such as the spatial environment and the cosmos (102-3). While this role for the human species, recapitulated within this zoe-centered vision, goes against Freud’s definition of civilization, which strongly represses any singularity with animals and the forces of nature, Braidotti and the other posthumanists signify this ethical advancement as necessary for our species and not as degeneration. Instead of seeing human players as the stimulus of all activity on Earth, posthumanist thinkers reject the whole notion of holding one species of vital life superior to all other. Linking back to Lefebvre, to deny this tenet of posthumanism would enforce an ontology that objectively benefits from the exploitation and commodification of non-human resources for human consumption. Especially in *The Drought* and *Concrete Island*, Ballard’s disrupted urban settings give full examples to such shifts towards a zoe-conscious paradigm and “neo-primitivism” (Braidotti 184). A material posthuman paradigm of neo-primitive qualities would be a world where unethical uses of technology are no longer employed to objectify zoe life forces. Humans would no longer use machines to perpetuate anthropocentric activities and in turn reevaluate the material evolution of human society. Pure human ability and our species reliance on technology are understated posthuman themes (Miccoli 59-77); from a variety of perspectives, Ballard examines these themes closely.

The hardships many of his early characters face epitomize worlds placed in crisis by the failures of anthropocentric technology, which leaves humans struggling to uphold humanist visions of an advanced society. His works provide spaces where characters and readers are confronted by anti-humanist dialectics that stem from Ballard's arguably posthuman interests in de-habituating provincial subject positions.

While his work is more frequently addressed through the lens of postmodernism, Ballard occupies an interesting position in relation to the concerns of posthuman studies. Particularly, it has been argued by Ballard himself, and his critics alike, that his thematic and aesthetic interests in spatial fusion and defamiliarization stem from his childhood experiences being brought up in Shanghai in the 1940s and his family's being interned at Lunghua internment camp during WWII. In his 1963 essay, "Time, Memory, and Inner Space," Ballard elaborates on his definition of his own writerly "inner space," citing his childhood memories of the developing urban space of China, and their ability to fuse with his visions of London (199-200; cf. "The End of My War"). Many associate a complex relationship among Ballard's depictions of London, visions of crisis, and his unconventional biographic experiences factoring into his work (Delville 76; Groes 79-80; Paddy 19-22). Paddy insists Ballard's early experiences led him to adopt a "highly critical attitude toward 'national customs and traditions,' and perhaps those of Britain most acutely" (13). Altogether, Ballard and other scholars support the idea that his past experiences afforded him the ability to approach life in the West with freshly critical eyes. Ballard simply did not need to try hard at all to defamiliarize his life in the West. His simultaneous "outsider-insider [and] insider-outsider" approach to depicting catastrophes and globalization tends to blur all distinction between the realms of the

global and the private, the inner and the outer, the human and the supposedly inhuman (Litt viii). These philosophical interests bind together posthumanism's major issues and critiques concerning subject embodiment and anamnesis, materiality in an increasingly virtual world of technological and cybernetic prosthesis. His emphasis on defamiliarizing human space, and ultimately what it means to be human in the era of late capitalism, excavates much of the underlying connections among books on posthumanism—many of which scarcely acknowledged each other, let alone Ballard specifically.

Many of posthumanism's contenders—Braidotti, Badmington, Miccoli, and Pepperell—seem to be working relatively independent of one another, besides all discussing Katherine Hayles' text, *How We Became Posthuman*. This book appears to be most central to posthuman studies, and actually does mention Ballard directly, but merely in relation to Marquis de Sade and eroticism coupled with the penetrability of bodies (Hayles 108). Instead, the majority of books on posthumanism focus on the role of technology and poststructuralism in works by Dick, Gibson, DeLillo, and Pynchon. Posthumanists propose literature to be an ideal outlet for posthuman themes and concepts to proliferate and be explored. These texts press readers to identify the central issues concerning posthumanism as crucial to our everyday understanding of the present conditions of humans and our environment. Critiques of the dehumanizing processes of capitalism serve as a central starting point for nearly all of these texts, urging readers to continually identify “how we live, how we conduct our exploitation of the environment, animals, and each other” (Pepperell 171-2). An ethical and Marxist critique such as this serves as a springboard for any posthuman reading of literature. Approaching posthumanist concerns in literature goes beyond addressing topics of technology.

What is most urgent to posthumanism, and posthumanist readings of literature, is a deflation and revaluing of the concepts of human and humanism entirely. Many texts within posthuman discourse, like *The Posthuman*, essentially focus on the need for a dialogical balance between stability and instability among subject identities and global systems, and their ability to adapt to further shifts in subject positions, finite ideologies, and ongoing revolutions in science and technology (Braidotti 93; Pepperell 168; Miccoli ix-xi; Hayles 285-6). A major benefit of approaching posthumanism through the urban settings of Ballard's novels is to interpolate posthumanism as primarily more concerned with wider issues of materialist discourse than the mere blurring between human identity and machines. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles concludes by emphasizing posthumanism's ethical dimension:

[T]he posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice. (286)

For Hayles, and other posthumanist thinkers, turning away from humanism is a turning away from an emptying promise of capitalistic venturing. She connects classical humanism to the stimulus of wealth, power, and leisure. Her definition of those truly able to call themselves humans, before any such posthuman turn, lines up with Braidotti's extension of Lefebvre's Marxist critique of the commodification of space discussed earlier. In this way, we may begin to identify an essential quality of humans as agents of exploitation in contrast to that of the exploited. However, we cannot allow ourselves to

see this dichotomy stand solely for the division between developed and developing nations, or between consumers and natural resources. Again returning from Lefebvre, we cannot equate the silent users of urban or suburban space with the superior agents of exploitations entirely. To some degree, users of urban spaces do not signify complete autonomy themselves. We must reevaluate the supposed autonomous agency of everyday humans operating within the objective scheme of urban centers.

Before applying the above theories of Lefebvre, and those of Braidotti and other the posthumanists, to Ballard's urban settings and subjects in *The Drought*, *Concrete Island*, and *Super-Cannes*, it is important to note how posthumanism operates, perhaps paradoxically, as both a revision and an extension of postmodern criticism. By acknowledging posthumanism as being both revered and shunned as the next "post fad," Braidotti is quick to maintain her perspective on this new field of discourse within the tradition of a "post-theory mood" and concrete political action (1-5). Her disdain for discursive critical theory compares to Lefebvre's above mentioned distrust of "wordmills." She distances posthumanism from postmodernism by asserting postmodernism remained anthropocentric and failed to escape repetitively melancholy stances (5). However, while the approaches of postmodern literary theory are more beaten paths than those of posthuman discourse, they share many of the same foundations, off-shoots, and critiques. Posthumanism seeks to unite all the discursive forces of post-structuralism, post-feminism, and post-colonialism, as well as animal rights and environmentalist movements, against "the homogenization of cultures under the effects of globalized advanced capitalism" (Braidotti 49). In combining these forces, posthumanism proclaims a model of human identity which confronts and incorporates

within itself “multiple others” (Braidotti 56). However, in doing so, discussions of posthumanism must resist the postmodern literary hallmarks of fragmented reality and subjectivities, and the inherent failures of quests for meaning or full human potential (Miccoli 42). From this perspective, posthumanism embraces its crises with relative ease while postmodernism appears stagnant and caught in a theoretical stalemate with its predecessor modernism. Yet this goal of ideological divergence commonly identified behind postmodernism and posthumanism alike is greatly limiting to their theoretical use.

Neil Badmington, in his 2003 essay “Theorizing Posthumanism,” urges critics to see these two arenas of discourse as parallels. Although discussing posthumanism, Badmington rhetorically echoes Jean-Francois Lyotard’s central argument in *The Postmodern Condition*, posing that posthumanism must be seen as a “working through” of humanism instead of a complete disunion, just as Lyotard poses that postmodernity must be “working through” of modernity (Badmington 20-2); to name this process, Badmington borrows Freud’s psychoanalytical concept of “anamnesis,” the therapeutic process of a subject remembering or “working through” deep trauma rather than continuing to repress (21). This is another concept that is crucial to approaching Ballard’s novels, whether one chooses to discuss it from the stance of postmodernism or posthumanism. Paddy directly evokes the language of anamnesis in comparing Ballard’s ambivalence towards modernism to the poet Philip Larkin’s speaker’s disdain for urban life in his poem “Going, Going”:

Ballard clearly had critical things to say about the effects of consumerism and electronic media. But rather than go backward, to pretend as if this modern world is not the one before us, Ballard urged readers to go

forward, to pass through the ‘evil,’ to absorb it and reuse it in radically new ways, to see what we might become at the other end. (Paddy 134)

Paddy sheds light on the complex subjectivities Ballard’s characters embody. His characters populate his novels by demonstrating major intersections between shifts in private and global paradigms. In comparable ways, each of Ballard’s periods deal with processual psychological changes in subjects beginning to approach their material context differently. Miccoli complicates posthuman anamnesis specifically by arguing for critical consideration of sheer human ability in our advanced technological age: “When we strip away all the layers of technology, all objects that came through human artifice, we are left only with the human. Thus we must return to the human, and the human’s most basic wants and needs, in order to understand the posthuman” (8). In contrast to postmodernism, the emergence of the posthuman essentially offers critics the theoretical concept of the posthuman to explore—be it a posthuman world or subject. This concept enables literary critics to readdress humanism and its technological evolution. In this way, the posthuman subject is most commonly discussed either in terms of human ability and identity while interfacing with technology, or in terms of what unblended human ability and identity signifies while enclosed within a technological age. Ultimately, within the discourse of the posthuman, critics have these two perspectives to work through, both of which Ballard’s novels exemplify and undermine.

First, and perhaps far more discussed, is what has been considered as an “extensionist” outlook (Pepperell 152). From this perspective, one deals with the ways in which humans use technology to extend, for better or worse, their actions. Discussing humans and their tools in this way interpolates Donna Haraway’s concept of cyborgs—

“creatures simultaneously animal and machine, which populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted” (291). Approaching subjects in this way follows Lefebvre’s notion of an abstract space dictating the dominate political and economic relations of its subjects; for Haraway, “The cyborg is our ontology; it gives our politics” (292).

Conversely, within posthumanism, there is a second perspective from which to view posthuman subjects. Instead of viewing technology and technological landscapes as necessarily extending the power of humans, posthumanists such as Miccoli consider the radical consequences of a total extensionist point of view. Scholars pose that humans have historically outsourced or invested their skills commercially into technology and cybernetics, which has diminished the abilities of humans to develop further on their own (Miccoli 107; Hayles 27; Thomsen 62-64). On this topic, Ballard also, in his “Project for a Glossary of the Twentieth Century,” expresses this cheeky definition of personal computers: “Perhaps unwisely, the brain is subcontracting many of its core functions, creating a series of branch economies that may one day amalgamate and mount a management buy-out” (279). While this pessimistic view of technology is often shadowed by the huge opportunities technological advancements continue to create, the paralleled rise of capitalism and globalization should not be forgotten. No doubt with this in mind, Braidotti is perceptive of the divergence between these two perspectives, and calls forth a drastic middle ground for the discourse of posthumanism, “which combine[s] elements of ultra-modernity with splinters of neo-archaism: high-tech advances and neo-primitivism, which defy the logic of the excluded middle” (Braidotti 184). It is this contradictory middle ground, and its array of crises, which Ballard’s fiction exploits to best demonstrate a vision of subjectivity and the urban context of the posthuman



condition. Ballard does not focus fully on the cyber-punk themes of human subjectivity extended through technological artifacts. While this theme is most present in *Crash*, Ballard most commonly urges readers through the cracks of human abstract space in order to destabilize consumerist cyborg tendencies.

Entering Ballard's urban zones is to be offered worlds fraught with the exuberance of peril. In offering worlds that are always on the brink, Ballard evokes critical intersections among all of the theoretical concepts we have outlined thus far: defamiliarization, abstract space, zoe-consciousness, anamnesis, and neo-primitivism. The same necessities posthumanists affirm are to be found fully voiced throughout Ballard's major periods. His radical ideas are reflected in the radical spaces he entices us to visit through his unique capacity for visual detail. When examined through concepts from Lefebvre and the posthumanists, the metaphorically surreal situations and settings in which Ballard's subjects find themselves are cleared of their bizarreness.

### **Beginning with the End in *The Drought***

Between 1961 and 1966, Ballard wrote four science fiction novels that each depicted global-scale catastrophes caused by resurgences of natural forces. These novels do not center on the science of these ecological disaster. They instead focus more on the social and psychological effects on Ballard's cast of survivors (Delville 8; Paddy 47). In contrast to Ballard's phases to follow, these novels provide visions of worlds in which capitalism, and everyday life within urban centers, has become irreversibly disrupted. With cities unable to function, remaining humans are also forced to dwell within their

urban worlds in more primitive survivalist contexts. Examining these novels, and especially *The Drought*, opens up the posthumanist notion of neo-primitivism by exposing how abstract space relies on controversial uses of technology.

The global heat-death premise of *The Drought* stands out among Ballard's other novels. Its catastrophe is overtly caused by society's own production of industrial waste, rather than "the side-effects of vast impersonal environmental or cosmic processes," such as in *The Wind from Nowhere*, *The Drowned World*, and *The Crystal World* (Green 81). Its fictional city of Mount Royal and lakeside suburb of Hamilton are subjected to years of an intensifying ecological disaster directly caused by anthropocentric processes connected to industry. Besides voicing a posthumanist critique against an economic paradigm lacking more zoe-conscious initiatives, *The Drought* offers us an ambivalent vision of nomadic human life repurposing itself in the twilight of urban-centers, automobile-culture, and suburbanization. The survivors of this ecological catastrophe embody an altered sense of humanity, which has been forced to take ethical responsibility for its own technological development.

The greater structure of *The Drought* is formed by Dr. Charles Ransom's returning to his native cityscape twice, and his finding the object of its abstract space increasingly defamiliarized to him. As Lefebvre highlights, the history and organization of cities stem from the construction of objectively economic spaces and the technological development of transit networks for commodities (49-53). But without a consumer economy, what are large urban populations left to do? The spatial details opening *The Drought* introduce us to Ransom while situating us within his geographical locations, as well as his locale's social and ecological climate:

After the closure of the hospital at Mount Royal he intended to leave for the coast, but at the last moment decided to spend a few final days on the lake before it vanished for good. Now and then, between the humps of damp mud emerging from the centre of the lake, he had seen the instant span of the motor-bridge across the river, the windows of thousands of cars and trucks flashing like jeweled lances as they set off along the coast road for the south; but for most of the period he had been alone. (18)

Recently divorced and dismissed from his employment in the city, Ransom is freed to leave his home and car behind, and to isolate himself on a sinking houseboat. The novel opens with Ransom's memory of the great "exodus" of cars all utilizing the urban infrastructure, which once served to import commodities (19). Their civil commitment to provide protection and provisions now terminated, the shutting down of Mount Royal and Hamilton causes the coast to now signify human survival. The ability to escape catastrophe is also signified by the cars Ransom watched leave. When he does confront the sight of his car in the driveway of his old house, "he [finds] it difficult to recognize, as if he were returning home after a lapse of not merely of a week but of several years" (43). Through Ransom, Ballard challenges the notion that technology may always serve to extend the identity and abilities of humans. Ransom's abandoning his car in the driveway of his marital home signifies his abandonment of his old suburban life, and in turn symbolizes Ransom's rejection of a complete escape from his urban context. Unlike his neighbors and most everyone else in the city, Ransom resists driving off towards any kind of escape. He prefers to walk throughout the novel, except when he is coaxed into commandeering an abandoned car by Ms. Quilter (119-120). But while Ransom's

decision to remain in Hamilton initially seems to stem from nostalgia, the other remaining inhabitants of this cityscape offer him conflicting perspectives on the present.

Above all Ransom's neighbors, the architect Richard Lomax and Reverend Howard Johnstone offer him considerable motives for seeing Hamilton through its crisis. Johnstone embodies an aggressive stance against the ecological change, whereas Lomax offers Ransom a more open-ended and adaptive response on the future of the city. Johnstone believes that "the battle against the drought, like that against evil itself, was the local responsibility of every community and private individual throughout the land," only to later escape Hamilton with his daughters (38-9). But this is before suffering a frightening assault and the burning down of his church by the unemployed fisherman. He perpetuates the aggressive stance of humanism within Pepperell's posthumanist mantra: "Humanists saw themselves as distinct beings in an antagonistic relationship with their surroundings. Posthumans, on the other hand, regard their own being as embodied in an extended technological world" (Pepperell 187). Johnstone fits this definition of a humanist only to be antagonized by fellow humans, all while technology begins to play a lesser available role in extending their advancement and survival.

The only technology continually available is the technologically shaped, concrete landscape of Hamilton—its roads and houses. Responsible for personally designing many of the local buildings, Lomax discusses this with Ransom as they overlook the burning cityscape below Lomax's estate. Lomax rejects Ransom's notion that humanity is moving backwards in time, arguing, "Don't talk to me about the balance of nature! If it wasn't for people like myself we'd all be living in mud huts [...] It's the future each of us has to come to terms with now" (62-3). Here, Lomax both embodies a proponent of posthuman

neo-primitivism and speaks on his civic role in urban development now past. He identifies that he no longer occupies the authoritative role of an urban planner, which Lefebvre holds to be powerful in contrast to the silent users of abstract space (Lefebvre 51). In *The Drought*, as in *Concrete Island*, architects confronting material implications of the spatial creations demonstrate central posthumanist concepts, especially the concern of subjective anamnesis. Ransom and Lomax come to understand they must work through the traumatized material conditions and remains left over from the paradigm of capitalism. They seek integration within their landscape instead of hiding from or drastically opposing its conditions.

The notion of urban spaces offering individuals shelter from the outside world runs throughout not only this novel, but *Concrete Island* and *Super-Cannes* as well. Ransom's houseboat is described as a "[space] capsule protecting him against the pressures and vacuums of time" (25). Similarly, his abandoned house is then compared to an impersonal motel room, "a perfect model of a spatio-temporal vacuum, inserted into the continuum of his life by the private alternative universe in the houseboat on the river" (44). Through these descriptions of Ransom's most private spaces, which his urban context affords him, we can understand the domestic spaces of suburban homes once heavily enforce the dialectics of inner and outer worlds. In both spaces, Ransom is surrounded by household appliances and mementos that are becoming less personally charged due to the pressing nature of the drought. For both his bodily and mental survival, Ransom is forced to look outward instead of within himself to identify the human being and actions necessary during this crisis. He finds the protection of these spaces unable to truly secure him from the outside world. This fact challenges what

literary critic Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, identifies as the “chief benefit” of a house: “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). Like within Freud’s definition of civilization, Bachelard supports the belief that homes within society serve to shelter individuals from the “non-house” forces of nature (40). For Ransom, to stay and dream would be to combat the global drought with his nostalgia and hope.

He instead integrates himself within material changes, continuing to uproot himself from familiar spaces and nomadically journey back and forth between Hamilton and the coast with others, directly exposing himself to the elements. Ransom embraces the alternative subjectivity Bachelard supposes, “Without [a home], man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world” (7). Bachelard’s concept of a home extends to signify stabilizing attributes of humanity itself. Man and his home are concentrated entities to an interchangeable degree; one represents the survival of the other in opposition to an outer world. For Bachelard, dispersive subjectivity and integration with non-home forces appear to be feared as humanity’s direct opposition. For posthumanism, on the other hand, it is something praised.

Ransom’s nomadic cycle of retreating and returning to the cityscape are not forms of escapism. Instead, his pilgrimages plot his “embracing of the future rather than resuscitating an old dying way of life” in one location (Paddy 67). He embodies what another scholar identifies as a “dissolving hero,” or a protagonist who objectively seeks to be absorbed material conditions (qtd. Deville 9). Throughout the novel, he abandons domestic settings, such as his coastal shack made of repurposed car scraps, which he

shares with his ex-wife Judith at the beginning of Part Two. In this way, Ransom continues to walk throughout the novel, arguably embodying much of Braidotti's unique notion of nomadic posthuman subjectivity, which "actively desire[s] to reinvent subjectivity as a set of mutant values and to draw our pleasure from that, not from the perpetuation of familiar regimes" (Braidotti 93). To find Ransom's dismissal of a stable home and heightened sense of mortality derived from each other, demonstrates his combined resistance to the sedimentary lifestyle. He rejects the habits imparted upon him by the consumerist spaces and activities of Hamilton and the coastal settlement alike. When he tries to enlist in the cooperative space of the coastal settlement, he is advised not to by one of Johnstone's daughters: "If you come here Charles, it will be the end of you. All day you'll be raking the salt from the boilers" (168). Ransom is confronted by Lefebvre's notion that abstract space dictates objective and often restrictive collective functions. To join the settlement would mean the end of his freewill to locate himself within the changed world, and potentially reopen himself to the exploitation necessary for humanity to regain its normal strength. Ransom communes with the conditions of his current world nearly to a suicidal degree in the end of the novel, where he leaves Hamilton and his companions behind again as it starts to rain. His neo-primitive sense of individualism is of his own becoming and nomadic context, unbound by abstract space.

Consequently, addressing the breaking down of urban spaces and dwellings in *The Drought* only addresses half of its potentially posthuman content. It offers a continuum of several subjects who in turn come to embody differently the great paradigm shift from capitalism to neo-primitivism alongside Ransom and Lomax. Beyond the scope of this article, further posthumanist readings of *The Drought* could especially focus more on

Ransom's social relationships with Catherine Austin, the zoo-keeper's daughter, and his young "aboriginal" ally, Philip Jordan (33). Looking at the de-urbanizing context in which these characters act instead serves to address the wider posthumanist critiques against the objectively materialist landscape of consumer space. More so during this period of novels than others, his novel *Hello America* excluded, Ballard concisely devised turbulent worlds where Western capitalism has nearly run its course and allows for something new to take its place—transmuting definitions of human life and fulfillment in its wake. In doing so, Ballard begins his full-time writing career defending the possibility that capitalism's reign, its design of abstract space and consumer technologies, cannot maintain control over dehumanized forces forever. However, as Badmington argues, postmodernism and posthumanism do not bring modernism and classical humanism to an abrupt end. One socioeconomic or ideological paradigm does not simply win a war against another entirely.

With *The Drought*, Ballard begins to give complex advice on how we may need to approach the potential posthuman landscapes of a future. Yet his perception of humanity's inability to allow its abstract space to integrate with outside forces and ethical accountability stem far back to his interment at Lunghua. In the final line of his 1995 autobiographical essay "The End of My War," he offers readers resonating insight into both his global disaster novels and urban disaster novels alike: "But to survive a war, especially as a civilian, one needs to accept the rules it imposes and even, as I did, learn to welcome it" (294). So while Charles Ransom no doubt embodies one civilian's adaptation to turbulent surroundings for survival, Robert Maitland, the London architect in *Concrete Island*, embodies far more resistance against posthuman perspectives.



### **Holiday of Suffering in *Concrete Island***

Whereas Ballard's global disaster novels throw readers into worlds already greatly defamiliarized by ecological forces, his urban disaster novels, *Crash*, *Concrete Island*, and *High Rise*, offer narratives more focused on the transitional stages of subjects beginning to question the context and activities of their urban surroundings. Purposely, their social and psychological trajectories are each directly set in motion by specific London locales. Comparable to points by Lefebvre, Ballard chooses London, as one critic argues, to prompt readers to view both the materiality and economic powers of contemporary urban centers as historically constructed: "physical London, as a dense conglomeration of buildings, streets, squares, theaters and cinemas, forms a city-as-text that allows us to read the history of London as a product of developing capitalism" (Groes 79). *Concrete Island* radically scrutinizes urban signatures of humanity—and classical conceptions of human beings—by exploring the posthuman concepts of neo-primitivism, cyborgs, and anamnesis, within the context of their contemporary moment. This is instead of exploring such concepts in context of near-future catastrophes, as with *The Drought*.

Spilling over from *The Drought*, Ballard maintains a strong emphasis on the technological age of automobile space throughout this period of novels. *Crash* and *Concrete Island* especially deal with concerns of urban technology comparable to Haraway's notion of cyborgs. In doing so, Ballard not only magnifies the relationship between humans and their technological other, but the relationships between socio-economic classes and the environment also. Perhaps more so than *Crash*, *Concrete Island*

serves to inject surreal posthuman mythology into the everyday urban landscape of massive freeway systems. The transgressive story of architect Robert Maitland's weeks marooned in the wasteland between major London freeways evokes the necessary posthuman ethics which prompt users of urban space to identify with the non-human subjects found to be oppressed by the objective forces of abstract space.

Somewhat similar to *The Drought*, Maitland's urban situation is overtly brought on by ethical and technological recklessness. But whereas the industrial waste suffocating the Earth's oceans in *The Drought* is framed within the development of global societies, Maitland's folly is far more instantaneous, private, and relatable to individual readers. Following the specific details of his car crash along a brand new stretch of London's motorway, the narrator offers further details that open the novel's theme of doubles:

The eyes staring back at him from the [rearview] mirror were blank and unresponsive, as if he were looking at a psychotic twin brother.

Why had he driven so fast? [...]

His seat belt, rarely worn, hung from its pinion by his shoulder. As Maitland frankly recognized, he invariably drove well above the speed limit. Once inside the car some rogue gene, a strain of rashness, overran the rest of his usually cautious and clear-minded character. (9)

Again in this novel, the material relationship between humanity and its technological landscape stimulates a frightening premise to develop ambivalent implications. Maitland openly blames himself for his actions behind the wheel, only as he acknowledges some other identity within himself exists. This twin identity, which is in part described as psychotic for its being unresponsive to the dire situation, is derived from Maitland's

becoming an everyday motorist circulating within London's motorway traffic. But while this highlights his modern role as a cyborg interfacing within an urban space, the island acts as a de-cyborging space forcing Maitland to work through this technological aspect of his identity. Without his car, Maitland confronts the neo-primitive conditions of his own bodily existence deep within the city he helped to design, by experiencing finite means of physical energy (24). Miccoli draws posthumanism's attention back to the human capabilities, positing an excellent metaphor for Maitland's situation: "We are not aware of the pencil as a tool until the point breaks, and it no longer functions as it's supposed to" (Miccoli 42). Left with his car destroyed and other high-speed cars preventing his escape, Maitland can no longer take the ease and safety of urban life for granted. Only without his car can he reexamine the role it plays in the cyborg identity necessary to the users of urban space. Likewise, only by being marooned on this area of land is Maitland able to see this space forgotten by the city-space he would otherwise be blind to as he passed by at 70 miles per hour daily between work and home.

To a surreal degree, the island grows larger throughout the novel. At first, the island is described as a triangle wasteland that neighbors both an "unofficial municipal dump" and a nearby shopping center, both of which Maitland can see, but is barred access to by a high perimeter fence (13). Just as Maitland is prevented from driving away from the island, he is prevented access to even the refuse of used urban commodities. Maitland sees the extent of his own survival without the amenities of consumer space. The drastic contrast of space around him becomes magnified by his suspension from capitalism: "The island seemed larger and more contoured, a labyrinth of dips and hallow. The vegetation was wild and lush, as if the island was moving back in time to an earlier and more violent

period” (102). Aside from the more pastoral, zoe-conscious description here, the themes of time and violence paradoxically complicate this setting. Somewhat like Ransom and Lomax’s dialogue about suburban dwellings appearing like mud huts in *The Drought*, this description of the island cast its current wild appearance to a more primitive time far away from 1973.

Furthering this defamiliarization, the ruins of previously modern structures—a church and crypt, Proctor’s air-raid shelter, Jane’s basement left over from a demolished cinema—appear objectively closed off or repressed from the rest of contemporary London’s vital landscape (Paddy 144). Maitland at first appears to reject the idea that this land belongs to London’s contemporary moment. While he “no longer recognizes the world he helped to create,” Maitland is forced to identify the social and spatial violence behind the forces of capitalism’s materialist development (Paddy 145). Borrowing a phrase straight out of Ballard’s essay “Which Way to Inner Space?”, the narrator offers a further surreal description of the island: “Maitland felt himself alone on an alien planet abandoned by its inhabitants, a race of motorway builders who had long since vanished but had bequeathed to him this concrete wilderness” (149). Here the narrator narrowly refers to this setting as posthuman. The urban landscape surrounding the island is said to be created by previous inhabitants who held the physical and technological means to implement such civic designs. Lefebvre’s conception of an authoritative class deemed able to shape abstract space is again brought to mind, but Maitland can no longer fully associate himself with these architectural players of his profession. As he contemplates the island, as well as his disassociation from the larger human city, he rides aback the “subnormal” ex-circus acrobat, Proctor, who serves as his double in this setting (98).

While he becomes increasingly fascinated by the island's seclusion, Maitland asserts Crusoe-like human dominance over the island in humanist fashion, instead of integrating himself into its preexisting subhuman social space. Failing his anti-social objective, his situation grows increasingly dire as he tries to escape it and exploit its underclass inhabitants. Before meeting Proctor and Jane, a forgotten circus acrobat and a misanthropic young runaway, he is quick to believe that he embodies the island by having struggled through its hardships for a few days; he claims to himself, "I am the island" (71). While on the one hand it is important to note how Maitland cares to identify with the island so intimately at all, on the other, he in many ways merely embodies a privileged humanist missionary sent to a primitive island in order to humanize its non-human subjects. Halfway through the novel, Maitland attempts to renounce his ties to capitalistic forces while arguing with Jane. He insists, "I'm not a business man. I'm an architect" (96-7). Just as Lefebvre would certainly challenge there being any ultimate difference between the objectives of these two civic professions, Paddy draws historicizing parallels between London's financial and architectural developments during the 1970's (Paddy 143). But in his current context on the island, Maitland simultaneously signifies both the race of motorway builders and the alien inhabitants left over. His trajectory through the novel, from everyday commuter, to elitist humanist, to neo-primitive isolate, serves to highlight his transitional process towards the kind of posthuman, destabilized subjectivity Ransom begins *The Drought* already possessing. The degree to which Maitland truly wishes to escape the island is constantly undermined. Throughout the novel, he arguably wishes to remain on the island in order to work through the potent subjective crisis its space provides.

In terms of their posthuman subjectivity, evidence of Maitland's anamnesis at the end of the novel, his working through of his urban cyborg identity, is severely more problematic than that of Ransom's more ecologically attuned nomadic subjectivity. In the end both protagonists favorably prolong the bodily hardships of their surreal crises, but the anti-social motives behind Maitland's quest to escape the island, "by his own efforts," demonstrate little change in his egotism: "He was glad that both Proctor and the young woman had gone. Their presence had brought out unwelcome strains in his character, qualities irrelevant to the task of coming to terms with the island" (175). His consistent aggression towards socializing with the island's locals as equals suggests his jealousy of these rejected humans who effortlessly survive in this land much better than he appears capable of. Yet alone, he is at peace, "sensing the stronger vibrations of the tall grass growing from the churchyard" and lying in Proctor's pavilion made of car doors, similar to the one constructed by Lomax (175-6). He maintains a deep affinity for the island's wild greenery throughout the novel, while refusing to confirm his repressed esteem for Proctor's simplemindedness and lack of humanist motives. Maitland frankly recognizes his desire to live like Proctor only after Proctor dies by accident trying to perform an acrobatic stunt on ropes draped down over the island by an unknowing maintenance crew above. In the end, Maitland reconfigures his personhood within this non-human zone of London's greater abstract space, but ultimately fails to adopt a fully zoe-conscious subjectivity. His glimpse of posthumanism lacks the ethics and global context Ransom adopts in *The Drought*.

*Concrete Island* ends with only one individual's vision of humanity shaken. While the transgressive experiences Maitland suffers are consequences of a private catastrophe,

London's economic and material development are larger issues worthy of historic and global concern. The expanses of consumer space and of automobile landscape play major roles in setting the stage for Maitland's plunge through the crash barrier. In *Concrete Island* and *High Rise*, human subjects grow to desire disruption to their conventional consumer lives, but are mainly less willing to denounce egotism and subsequent violence—both of which prevent Braidotti's full vision of a social posthuman paradigm. During this period of his novels, Ballard suspects that individualist human egotism, set against class issues and the environment, will stand in the way of a true posthuman paradigm. *Concrete Island* offers a plaintive allegory concerning both rampant technological development and social consequences of immense urban environments. As Maitland chances upon this crack in the total abstract space of London, he likewise chances upon a crack in his own modern identity. He is given the rare opportunity to openly face repressed antitheses, violence, and subversive desires that aid his radical anamnestic process through his hyper capitalist context. Maitland fails to literarily embody Braidotti's posthumanist ethics for readers, but succeeds in personally denying the hegemony of London's abstract space.

### **The Violence of Paradise in *Super-Cannes***

After periods of less categorizable and more autobiographical works, Ballard produced a final series of crime novels following a similar formula, in order to reiterate cultural and political warnings. Much like his other works, *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* center on explorations of material and social spaces constructed under the

parochial pretense of allowing subjects to escape ideology, nationality, and history (Paddy 282). His final novels, *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come* finally returned Ballard's similar focus to the greater London area. Each of these four novels follow an amateur detective pursuing some mysterious case of homicide, while plotting their protagonist's own moral clashes with charismatic ideologies of violence. Consumerism, late capitalism, and neoliberalism all play direct roles in shaping these "postmillennial fictions" within Ballard's literary geography (Tew 108; Baxter 102). As a consequence, the material crises of these contemporary worlds are induced by an uncertain socio-economic future and violent political protest.

In contrast to *The Drought* and *Concrete Island*, *Super-Cannes* is set in an enclave of conspicuously financial abstract space geared more towards digital capabilities. The protagonist and his wife, Paul and Jane Sinclair, come to integrate within the dark underside of the international business community of Eden-Olympia in inverse ways. Jane, who has been invited to practice pediatrics at Eden-Olympia, is employed to replace her ex-lover David Greenwood. She loses track of herself and body as she becomes more invested in both helping to bring online a cybernetic medical diagnostic and participating in questionable "games" with Eden Olympia socialites (384). Left to recover from a minor plane crash—a situation not entirely unlike Maitland's case of recklessness—Paul tracks down evidence in order to understand Greenwood's motives in his suicidal shooting spree. In doing so, he uncovers a wide range of unethical social and political activities going around Eden Olympia, which all operate from deluded definitions of humanism and human freedom (256-266). His discoveries and participation in these activities ultimately drive him to engage in homicidal violence similar to



Greenwood's actions.

Instead of being forced into some culturally telling, spatially repressed zone amid abstract space, as Maitland faces, Paul purposely entangles himself in the social disorders of humanism encoded in the sleek modernity of Eden-Olympia. He ultimately comes to identify his own passive contributions to the nationalistic and economic facets of globalization, which begin to take more literal forms as the business park's "gangs of executives attack the immigrant poor in order to establish a reflexive conviction concerning their collective, superior selfhood" (Tew 112). In this way, *Super-Cannes* provides a posthuman narrative in which subjects of humanity mount radical political stances against its own rampant and technological development abroad. Paul's crises embody internal crises within humanism.

The divergence between urban virtuality and materiality is a central posthuman theme in *Super-Cannes*. Hayles and Braidotti both draw attention to the disproportionate power relations between the increasing virtual reach of urban centers and the rest of the material world (Hayles 20; Braidotti 180). Perhaps with this in mind, Paul at once introduces readers to the "intelligent" city of Eden-Olympia by resisting the idealism its abstract space objectifies (3). Ballard has Paul read deep into this place's completely contrived materiality, while also seeming to allude back to *Concrete Island*:

The glass and gun-metal office blocks were set well apart from each other, separated by artificial lakes and forested traffic islands where a latter-day Crusoe could have found comfortable refuge. The faint mist over the lakes and the warm sun reflected from the glass curtain-walling seemed to generate an opal haze, as if the entire business park were a mirage, a

virtual city conjured into the pine-scented air like a *son-et-lumière* of a new Versailles. (7-8)

The natural space consumed to build Eden-Olympia is neither as spatially nor historically constricted as London. Able to arrange its own sense of nature around its modern buildings, this caliber of total abstract urban space flaunts no inner repression. Traffic islands are not wastelands. They have been objectively manicured to be hyperreal, so as to authenticate the ethical and ecological character of Eden-Olympia's users (Lefebvre 83). All social and natural non-human space is fully repressed within Eden-Olympia's high walls. It is only later, during Part III, that any kind of zoe-consciousness is able to the surface. What is new to our discussion of posthumanism in Ballard's depictions of abstract spaces here is how Ballard offers a vision of humans living increasingly more virtually, beyond activities bound by physical space. Paul describes these first impressions while focusing greatly on its virtual qualities. He later envisions Eden-Olympia's "satellite dishes draining information stored in the sky" and its "busy electronic traffic" (36). A few chapters in, he poses an important question about the objectified natural space of Eden-Olympia's fake nature trails: "What's the point of all this landscape if no ones sets foot on it?" (59). He is told by Harder, one of the Eden-Olympia's security personnel, that nature is more for show. Eden-Olympia's virtual businesses and finance firms drive its professional activity. With its materiality subordinated to its virtual global power, its social and ethical capacity is severely marginalized.

The social relations pervading this abstract space, between the subjects of Eden-Olympia and those of the outside world, do not ethically match its humanistic facade.

One way to approach the human subjects of *Super-Cannes* is to understand how these enclaved users dehumanize the humans outside their walls. The city's main proponent and socialite, the lewd psychiatrist Wilder Penrose, encourages Paul to consider how the users of Eden-Olympia physical brutalize the lower classes outside of the city in order to regain bodily health, and subsequent higher work productivity, through catharsis (259-260). Penrose continues to justify socio-political violence by either trivializing it or implicating all of Eden-Olympia subjects together within his corporate community-building exercises. In this way, Penrose perpetuates the exact elitist conception Hayle's vision of posthumanism opposes, that human subjects are idealized and comprised mainly of the wealthy and powerful few who consume lesser beings— non-humans, animals, the environment (Hayles 286). Paul is earlier warned of the city's superior facade by one of the widows of Greenwood's victims who lives outside of the city on questionable settlement money: "Eden-Olympia is very civilized, and very corrupt" (138). This is the most honest statement Paul receives on the paradox of Eden-Olympia's abstract space, yet it also generalizes some major critiques about humanism in general.

Braidotti points out how violence has been committed both in the name of humanism and against it. She maintains humanism occupies a complex, "multi-faceted" paradox of historic significance that is location specific (15-16). Yet, there appears to be no benefit of humanism in *Super-Cannes*. There is both bodily danger and social violence in living both inside and around the objectively pure abstract space of Eden-Olympia. On the invention of new forms of power and violence resulting from "ahistorical, apolitical, and amoral spaces," Ballard scholar Jeanette Baxter argues the enclaves of *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* still embody "labyrinths of contemporary European history and

culture” which seek to alienate (96-97); she draws attention to the readerly defamiliarization these texts offer:

This process of immersing oneself in the labyrinth is not only important for confronting difficult questions about agency, guilt and moral responsibility which these texts foreground. It also marks an integral and invariable disquieting process of self-reflection: to what extent are we, the readers, implicated in, or complicit with, the criminal horrors of contemporary history? (Baxter 97)

Paul’s trajectory through the novel, from participant observer to violent protestor, follows his ability to read deeper into material conditions. During this phase as well, Ballard plots his characters’ increasing attraction to complex moral, political, geographical subjectivities. Paul, perhaps most of all, embodies this thematic choice due to his increasing reactionary choices to recontextualize himself back within a global context and its repressed history. Unlike the implications of personal fates left to Ransom and Maitland in the end of their novels, readers are left unsure if Paul’s transgressive actions will make any larger historical difference, especially when we keep in mind that his solitary actions repeat those of Greenwood’s failed efforts against the material and social dimensions of urban development.

While all three protagonists take on external conditions, Paul’s experience of posthuman anamnesis is more akin to Ransom’s nomadic trajectory than Maitland’s private embrace of neo-primitivism. However radical, both Paul and Ransom progressively strive to embody their wider changing worlds, instead of seeking to maintain the passive status quo of their consumer spaces. In contrast to Ransom and

Maitland, Paul must work harder to break the surface of the social paradigm being implemented by Eden-Olympia. He does not have a natural catastrophe to help him see the human world beyond the functioning concrete reality surrounding him, nor is he forcefully dehumanized out of his modern habits. Instead, Paul plays the role of a participant observer for as long as he holds his silence. As a detective as well, he personally works through various complex explanations behind the violence of both Greenwood and Penrose's motives, instead of being satisfied by "whodunit" answers (Baxter 97). As Penrose's "laboratory rat," Paul's moral subjective is objectively challenged continuously within the same contrived material conditions of Eden-Olympia, which Penrose believes triggered Greenwood (335). Paul gains first hand insight on what Penrose means by, "The Adolf Hitlers and Pol Pots of the future won't walk out of the desert. They'll emerge from shopping malls and corporate business parks" (256). Desensitized to aggression and violence like Greenwood, Paul believes violence as his only available means of fouling Eden-Olympia's reputable future.

Still connected to the spread of ethnocentric and political violence, the further ecological violence posed by the construction of Eden II drives Paul towards his homicidal action at the end of Part III. *Super-Cannes* does not end offering an ideal vision of a posthuman future where urban environments construct ethically alongside nature. It demonstrates further intersections among the current political, economic, and spatial issues facing the possibility of a materialized posthuman paradigm. Here, all of nature is either an aesthetic backdrop to unethical behavior, a simulation, or a commodity to exploit. When Eden II's groundbreaking ceremony is briefly interrupted by an aerial green protest, Penrose stands beside the tractors and scoffs, denouncing its efforts as

pointless “green nonsense” (359). Even though he supports liberal and libertine behavior, Penrose continues to believe the conservative future of abstract space and virtual humanity lies in concrete cityscapes:

The future was a second Eden-Olympia, almost twice the size of the original [...] The site-contractors were already at work, clearing the holm oaks and umbrella pines that had endured since Roman times, surviving forest fires and military invasions. Nature, as the new millennium dictated, was giving way for the last time to the tax shelter and the corporate car park. (356)

*Super-Cannes* maintains strong materialist posthuman critiques in Part III, by extending its ethical critiques of corporate power and virtual banking further into the ecological destruction of historic space. The increased scale of space being constructed here serves as a major detail, but so does the increased role technology plays in the marking of this land. More so than natural and political forces of the past, financial means help to ensure that the land for Eden II is technologically leveled and emptied of its original context. Money and technology go hand in hand here—strengthening the capitalist paradigm of commodified space by physically constructing it further.

For better or for worse, the new ideologies of the future must reconcile the global rise of consumerism’s hegemonic development across nations. The political and ideological narrative *Super-Cannes* contains depicts an increasingly virtual world in which the material future of humanity appears uncertain. It poses a dark satire on the paradise the future may become to select humans scattered across urban centers. Unlike any other of Ballard's settings, the arrival of characters at Eden-Olympia only at first

appears to be a great prize. But, as it quickly turns out, to live outside of history and ideology is only a paradise for those with the power to enact violence against it. The powers behind this caliber of abstract space go beyond perpetuating the commodifying activities of capitalism. Ballard warns how these spaces tend to amplify past injustices and breed radical types of social violence. He again offers no definitive answer or tested method to combating these uses of abstract space. As with *The Drought* and *Concrete Island*, Ballard highlights the notion that there may not be one widespread approach towards working through the anthropocentric paradigm we inhabit. While Braidotti urges posthumanists to look beyond the means of violence as an answer, Ballard again and again urges readers to rethink the psychological crises and power violence lends. To consider violence as part of our innate human nature, it certainly deserves its own sense of anamnesis.

### **Conclusion**

The works of J.G. Ballard offer no ideal visions of cities in the conventional sense. He gives us new and extreme perspectives from which to approach the material world we have to work through towards the future. The social and spatial isolation of his characters and settings are continually inverted, reiterating the heightened sense of interconnectedness posthumanism demands. As Braidotti concludes, “Becoming-posthuman consequently is a process of redefining one’s sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be” (193). This radical zoe-centric paradigm is the ideal context many

of Ballard's character are in the process of embodying, despite the commercial environment around them. They find life embellished by their controversial abdications of previous identities and urban contexts. The ethics of entering into a zoe-centered society are far more inviting than that of Freud's definitions of civilization. But any kind of posthuman future must face the huge material processes, efforts, and landscape global capitalism has technologically reinforced.

While the discourse of the posthuman examines how humans will come to interface with increasing technological advancements, there is also the sentiment that humans must learn to critique the necessities or validity of such developments. To what degree do technology, urbanization, and consumerism all signify each other? Posthumanism approaches this question by grounding zoe-centric critiques in progressive ethics and inclusive social advocacy. Whether we deem Ballard an early proponent of posthumanist or not, it is important to identify how his work subvert humanism and urge readers to confront global issues and ethical accountability concerned with contemporary human life. From his earliest novels and beyond *Super-Cannes*, he points to how the material catastrophes facing the everyday users of urban spaces are becoming objectively less noticeable—both concealed and encoded in the concrete landscape around us. The immensity of urban space is humanism's spatial sense of hubris, which urges humans to believe there is no other way towards the material future. Yet while the works of J.G. Ballard undermine this belief from a number of different perspectives, Ballard poses no alternative place for humans to live. He instead affirms that humans must continue to understand how the materiality we empower ultimately confines us.



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