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Ecopsychology in J. G. Ballard's Fiction

Abstract I: Con la sua famosa tetralogia pubblicata negli anni '60, J. G. Ballard segnò una svolta nella letteratura distopica allontanandosi da temi socio-politici a questioni ambientali. Appassionato di psicologia e psicanalisi, amava studiare gli effetti dell'ambiente (naturale o urbano) sulla psiche umana. Ballard credeva che vi fosse un sottile rapporto tra l'uomo e i suoi possibili habitat, la cui messa in crisi ne avrebbe minato l'equilibrio psicofisico. In romanzi come *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975), lo scrittore analizza le reazioni della psiche umana a spazi iper-tecnologizzati, inaugurando così le tematiche dell'ecopsicologia, una disciplina emergente che studia la relazione tra ambiente e salute mentale.

Abstract II: J. G. Ballard prompted a turn in dystopian literature from political/social issues to environmental concerns with his famous tetralogy in the 1960s. Fascinated by psychology and psychoanalysis, he was interested in the effects of urban and natural surroundings on the human psyche. He believed in the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, and was convinced that an unbalanced relationship could affect people's psychological equilibrium. Novels like *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975) investigate the reactions of the human psyche to hyper-technologized habitats, which makes him a forerunner of ecopsychology, an emerging discipline studying the connections between mental health and the environment.

1. The Human Psyche in a Changing Environment

In the obituary for James Graham Ballard's death, written by Martin Amis in *The Guardian* on 25 April 2009, Amis wrote that

[Ballard] kept asking: what effect does the modern setting have on our psyches – the motion sculpture of the highways, the airport architecture, the culture of the shopping mall, pornography and technology? The answer to that question is a perversity that takes various mental forms, all of them extreme (Amis 2009).

J. G. Ballard (1930-2009) is mainly known as a science-fiction writer. His position in this genre, however, has always been anomalous. After relatively conventional beginnings in the American and British science-fiction tradition, he developed his own style and angle of vision. He never really won the favour of the critics or the public in the U.S. and was ostracised by American mainstream science fiction and pigeon-holed as a 'new wave' writer.

Ballard had more success in South America, Britain and Europe in general, where he was recognised both as a science-fiction and a literary writer (Brigg 1985: 12). His surrealistic settings, his concern with the exploration of the human psyche in changing existential conditions and the ambiguous endings of his stories (conveying scepticism towards an idea of science and technology as all-powerful) account for his status of non-canonical science-fiction writer. Jeannette Baxter underlines his prescience, namely, his ability to anticipate “the myriad realities of our disturbed modernity”, also noticing what the adjective “Ballardian” has come to signify in common speech, as recorded in the Collins English Dictionary:

BALLARDIAN: (adj) [...] resembling or suggestive of the conditions described in Ballard's novels & stories, esp. dystopian modernity, bleak manmade landscapes & the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments (Baxter 2008: 1).

As Amis underlined, Ballard was particularly interested in the impact that the environment (natural or urban) could have on humans and their mental sanity. This is already manifest in his famous tetralogy of the 1960s, four “disaster novels” describing major upheavals in nature and the human response to them. In *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962), what begins as an inconvenience to shipping and air travel grows into a cataclysm stripping away the Earth's topsoil. *The Drowned World* (1962) and *The Drought* (1964) depict the possible effects of climate change. In the former temperature increases due to solar storms cause the melting of ice-caps, leading the world into a pre-historic tropical era. In the latter radioactive waste from prolonged industrial dumping has covered the offshore waters of the world's oceans, thus preventing the formation of rain clouds. The novel illustrates the growing aridity of the Earth over a span of ten years and the ensuing consequences of violence and insanity among mankind. Finally, *The Crystal World* (1966) offers an apocalyptic vision of a world undergoing a process of crystallization. Only three months are described, but the phenomenon is forecast to cover one third of the Earth's surface within a decade.

Critics have underscored that Ballard's focus is on human reactions to natural disasters rather than the reasons for the disasters themselves. Unlike most science-fiction novelists optimistically relying on man's resourcefulness and promoting faith in original scientific solutions, Ballard presents humans as unable to overcome the inexorable modifications in natural conditions and simply adapting to them. This is where the writer's analysis of their reactions starts. The stress inflicted to human nature by the various catastrophes is his main concern. He explores the individual's fight for survival but also the pathological patterns of human behaviour that arise in changed conditions of existence, ranging from increasing self-perception to lack of affectivity, from the development of bizarre traits to the rise of brutal violence and primitive instincts. Two of Ballard's later novels are particularly interesting in this respect: *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975). They belong to the so-called “urban disaster trilogy”, which also includes *Crash* (1973), made into an award-winning film by David Cronenberg in 1996. Like the tetralogy they belong to the disaster genre, but, instead of dealing with reactions to vast catastrophes, they investigate the effects of urbanisation and complex technology on man.

2. The Pathology of Civilisation

The interconnection between surrounding physical space and mental equilibrium is the research field of ecopsychology, an emerging discipline seeking to establish how our links to the natural world (in a wide sense) affect mental health and how re-forming them might improve it. In an article on the online journal *Vivid* Vanessa Spedding enumerates a series of publications connected to this topic, all of which are grounded in the conviction that humans and nature are deeply bonded and the former's alienation from the natural environment can be the cause of mental instability or diseases¹. In fact, she writes,

Ecopsychology proposes that the study of the mind should encompass the world in which that mind exists, including the physical environment [...]. It suggests that Western society's presumption of a separation between humans and nature is a dangerous illusion that denies us the experience of these bonds and provokes in us a degree of mental suffering that manifests in the psychological illnesses and imbalances we experience today (Spedding 2009).

Spedding in particular insists on the rising spread of depression in the affluent West, quoting figures provided by the World Health Organisation: "Depression [...] affects about 121 million people worldwide and is a 'leading cause of disability'. By leading, it means that depression is expected to be the second highest contributor to premature death or incapacitating disability by 2020" (Spedding 2009).

This is in tune with the point made by Erich Fromm sixty years ago in *The Sane Society* (1956) that the highest suicide and alcoholism rates were in affluent Northern European countries such as Denmark, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden and in the United States, with the main difference that the U.S. had the fifth place in the category of suicides while they were leading in the estimated number of alcoholics. These figures are read by Fromm as symptoms of diffused "mental disturbance" in countries that are among "the most democratic, peaceful and prosperous" in the world (Fromm 1956: 10). Two key concepts in Fromm's study are relevant to our analysis of Ballard's fictions: the "pathology of normalcy" and "consensual validation". Many psychiatrists and psychologists, he holds, object to the idea that society as a whole might be lacking in sanity. According to them "the problem of mental health in a society is only that of the number of 'unadjusted' individuals and not of a possible unadjustment of the culture itself" (6). On the contrary, Fromm will not investigate individual pathologies but the "pathology of normalcy" (6), in particular the pathology of contemporary Western society. In this context, "consensual validation" (14) is the mechanism transforming wrong or unhealthy behaviours into socially acceptable ones. "It is naïvely assumed", says Fromm, "that the fact that the majority of people share certain ideas or feelings proves the validity of these ideas and feelings. Nothing is further from the truth" (14).

¹ Spedding mentions the pioneering work of Theodore Roszak *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* (1992) and the peer-reviewed online journal *Ecopsychology*, edited by Peter H. Kahn (University of Washington), <http://www.liebertpub.com/overview/ecopsychology/300/>. She also refers, among others, to two seminal essays: David Edwards' *Free to Be Human: Intellectual Self-defence in an Age of Illusions* (1995) and Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1956).

Socially constructed patterns are promoted (in particular through the mass media) in order to enable people to live with a defect without becoming ill. A “socially patterned defect” (15) does not threaten the security of the individual, who doesn’t feel inadequate, isolated or different from the others. Of course, this might not work with a minority (people more sensitive or of greater integrity) who are then perceived as outcasts or become prey of neurosis (14-18).

Fromm develops and integrates an issue raised by Freud in his *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), namely that the evolution of society and civilization has striking similarities to the development of the individual and is based on instinctual renunciation: “In actual fact, primitive man was better off in this respect, for he knew nothing of any restrictions on his instincts. [...] Civilized man has exchanged some part of his chances of happiness for a measure of security” (Freud 2000-2005: 26). The repression of instincts into the domain of the unconscious is a necessary condition of civilisation, which offers sublimatory activities (ideological, artistic, scientific) in exchange for the loss of instinctual satisfaction: “sublimation is a fate which has been forced upon instincts by culture alone” (18). So, for Freud civilisation is based on a “cultural privation” (18), elsewhere better translated as “frustration”², which humans compensate with gratifications in other fields, including their mastery over nature and increasingly technological development. This leads Freud to finally wonder if “many systems of civilization – or epochs of it – possibly even the whole of humanity – have become *neurotic* under the pressure of the civilizing trends” (39). The diagnosis of collective neurosis – only hypothesised by Freud, who does not venture into research on the pathology of ‘civilised’ communities – is reinforced and further investigated by Fromm in *The Sane Society*.

If Freud’s aim was to highlight the contradictions inherent in the concept of civilisation, weighing its advantages and disadvantages to human beings, Fromm’s analysis contemplates what has been lost in the civilising process throughout the centuries. The promise of a bright future for humankind, prompted by the advance of science and technology, industrialisation and capitalist economy worldwide, has not been kept. Fromm depicts the modern world in gloomy terms, as a regression in man’s evolution³:

Happiness becomes identical with consumption of newer and better commodities [...]. Not having a sense of self except the one which conformity with the majority can give, he is insecure, anxious, depending on approval. He is alienated from himself, worships the product of his own hands, the leaders of his own making, as if they were above him, rather than made by him. He is in a sense back where he was before the great human evolution began in the second millennium B. C. He is incapable to love and to use his reason, to make decisions, in fact incapable to appreciate life and thus ready and even willing to destroy everything. The world is again fragmentalized, has lost its unity (356).

² In the edition of *Civilisation and its Discontents* included in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXI, 1961: 97, it is translated “cultural frustration”.

³ In this paragraph I am using the term “man” instead of the more politically correct “humans” to be consistent with Fromm’s wording.

Freud's and Fromm's analyses introduced and anticipated many themes later developed by environmental scholars in pointing to the threat of new forms of regression for mankind generated by the triumph of the mechanistic order. Environmental philosophers and ecocritics have increasingly referred to the modern age as "post-natural", stressed the alienation of humans from the non-human world and analysed its consequences. In *The Death of Nature* (1980), Carolyn Merchant traces the passage in the 18th century from an organic to a modern mechanical order, according to which the earth is an inanimate object to be manipulated. Merchant laments the loss of a holistic view, grounded in the idea of "cyclical processes, of the interconnectedness of all things, and the assumption that nature is active and alive" (1980: 293) in favour of the dominant mechanistic mode of thought, which has brought an unbalanced and ethically unfair system of natural, social and gender hierarchies. In *The End of Nature* (2006) Bill McKibben highlights how humans are no longer tossed by larger forces but have become those larger forces. Referring to the effects of climate change, he views the end of nature as synonymous with technocratic faith, leading to disastrous consequences for the earth's ecosystems and humankind. The present trend of environmental studies is therefore confirming Freud's and Fromm's intuitions in pointing to the uneasy position of human beings, bound by "instrumental reason" to be "tools of their tools", to use H. D. Thoreau's words (Iovino 2016: 32-34). Environmental studies and ecocriticism, deep ecology and social ecology question the grand myths of modernity and progress, affirm post-materialist values and lifestyles, and underline that "the unit of survival is an organism-in-its-environment" (Mathews 1991: 74), stressing the bonds of individuals to their natural and cultural environments. Therefore, they promote ethical interactions between the human and non-human world, reject vertical hierarchies, support values of reciprocity and communality, and focus on the rehabilitation of one's particular "habitat" regarded as one's "home" (according to the etymology of the Greek word "eco"), as promoted by the radical school of thought of bioregionalism fighting against global homologation (Glotfelty 2006: 7).

Concrete Island and *High-Rise* offer a dystopian depiction of such regression as a reaction to habitats created by insane societies. Both novels take to their extreme consequences the results of a hyper-technological world that has lost sight of the essential needs of human beings and seems to have become an end in itself. It is also a world where repressed primordial instincts are destined to be set free in order to fill those needs, in a fatal process of devolution.

3. An Ecopsychological Analysis of *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise*

Concrete Island tells about the marooning of an apparently well-established wealthy architect, Robert Maitland, on a traffic island on the outskirts of London after a front-tyre blow-out. This "non-place" of Western technology – a triangle of waste ground under the elevated junction of a highway – is incredibly close to the city but also extremely isolated and impenetrable, because it has no precise function in the complex motorway system: it is a forgotten and anonymous terrain, surrounded by concrete, ringed by wire-mesh fences and sealed off from the world around by steep embankments. It is also insulated against social surveillance and external assistance, as in a glass jar, due to the loud noise of motor engines covering any possible cry for help and the indifference of careless drivers running at full speed along the highway.

The secluded environment engenders a series of reactions from the injured and then disabled protagonist. Trapped in a no-man's land of "civilisation", Maitland first engages in a struggle for survival, then tries to escape by climbing the embankment and attracting the drivers' attention but to no avail. He finally decides to stay, falling into a regressive primitive state. Like Robinson Crusoe, Maitland takes possession of his territory and its resources, and invests the "capital" he rescued from the accident to thrive. He subjugates the other two inhabitants of the traffic island (two outcasts of society: Proctor, a brain-damaged ex acrobat, and Jane, a young prostitute), without whom he would not have survived, and becomes the king of the place. Two highly symbolic gestures epitomise Maitland's power and his regression into a primordial state: his urinating on Proctor – a way to mark the territory as in animal behaviour – and his using the man as a means of transport to be carried around. Moreover, Maitland's sexual appetites are satisfied by the young prostitute, who becomes a substitute for his unsatisfying affective life. Philip Tew has read *Concrete Island* as a reworking of *The Tempest*, with Maitland exhibiting "an increasingly Prospero-like self-assertion" and becoming "increasingly aggressive towards the others". His "concluding sense of self is one of dominion", while Proctor's accidental death is seen as a sacrifice which reinforces Maitland's self. In Ballard, adds Tew, "the sacrificial impulse illuminates either a kind of regression (a reaching for that which is absent, lost and recollected dimly) or an archetypal sense of the self" (Tew 2008: 114).

Ballard's surrealist setting can also be read as a metaphor of contemporary society. Quoting sociologist Marshall Berman writing at the end of the 1970s, Samuel Francis describes the problem of modernity as "the destruction of a vital form of public space" that has been replaced by "an aggregation of private material and spiritual interest-groups, living in windowless monads, far more isolated than we need to be" (Francis: 123. Quoted from Berman 1983: 34). This condition is epitomised by Maitland's inability to draw the drivers' attention. In Western highways, says Reyner Banham, each driver has acquired the freedom to travel long-distance at the price of an "almost total surrender of personal freedom" and "a complete surrender of will to the instruction" on the road signs: a statement directly referring to the American motorway system (Francis: 123. Quoted from Banham 1971: 217, 219). As a consequence,

Maitland is here rendered insignificant in the eyes of passing drivers by the scale and speed of a purposeful technology. In *Concrete Island* the cityscape repeatedly interposes inhuman distances and hard, opaque barriers in the way of human contact (Francis 2011: 123).

The rationalised technological landscape is in fact dehumanising and annihilating. In this context Maitland has turned into a lifeless puppet. The traffic island also recalls a post-modern landscape, in its carrying anthropogenic signs everywhere, despite its wilderness. The place is full of scattered waste and debris: cigarette packs, confectionery wrappers, used condoms, discarded tyres and cables. An exploration of the site reveals to Maitland a sort of archaeological stratification. Parts of the islands dated much before World War II, with worn headstones of an abandoned churchyard and ground-courses of demolished Edward-

ian terraced houses. There are also ruins of air-raid shelters and a post war cinema, together with the remains of a more recent Civil Defence post (Ballard 1994: 41, 69). The place is the epitome of consumer society: its overproduction, excessive waste and inability to reintegrate waste in the natural cycle. And the relics of human history are treated as garbage: their memory is erased.

An alienating environment cannot but produce alienated responses. Francis links the responses of Ballard's characters with the theories of psychiatrist R. D. Laing (1927-1989) – a major influence on Ballard, together with Freud and Jung – who saw “alienation as the normal condition of modern man” (Francis 2011: 120). Laing was a member of the anti-psychiatry movement, whose basic argument was that “psychiatric illness was ‘not medical in nature but social and legal’, that it was in fact a socially constructed myth” (Francis 2011: 62. Quoted from Shorter 1997: 274), a position close to Foucault's theory in *Histoire de la Folie* (1961). Laing underlined the ontological insecurity of modern man, the psychotic potentials inherent in every human and the fine line between sanity and insanity. Maitland's regression can therefore be read as the release of repressed primordial instincts triggered off in his new condition. At the end of the novel an emaciated Maitland seems to have purposely renounced escaping. As Brigg explains:

The events have a growing meaning for Maitland as he finds his civilised and socialised self being peeled off to reveal the survivor who actually glories at having left behind him a complex web of family, career, and upbringing, which have fettered him without his conscious knowledge (73).

Despite its ambiguous ending, the book warns us of the fragile balance on which our technologized reality is founded, a world where sophisticated structures have subverted the natural order and can produce unpredictable voids, bugs of a system, dangerous holes into which we can fall. The microcosm that is recreated in the traffic island reproduces a tribal structure. It is a regressive state which however satisfies primeval, physical and affective needs: those needs that were probably not satisfied in Maitland's life, as epitomised by his wife speeding off on the motorway, without noticing him. A “windowless monad” among others.

High-Rise is another metaphor of contemporary society and it is also an even more explicit and iconic in showing the results of artificial environments on the human psyche. The novel chronicles the rapid changes that take place in a vast forty-storey apartment tower (a high-rise) east of central London as its inhabitants “shed their pretences of upper-middle-class civilisation and become hunters and hunted in a struggle for survival within the closed environment of the building” (Briggs 1985: 68). The area where the luxury high-rise stands is part of a larger futuristic project of urban development, including five identical tower blocks (four of which under construction), an ornamental lake, concrete plazas, an auditorium and television studios. The site under development has covered a district of abandoned dockland and warehousing along the north bank of the river.

At the very beginning the protagonist, Dr Laing⁴, appreciates the impeccable and reassuring geometry of the complex, in contrast with the “ragged skyline” of the city in the distance, which “resembled the disturbed encephalograph of an unresolved mental crisis” (Ballard 2016: 5). Yet, in the course of the novel its regularity becomes more and more associated with images of disease, paranoia, obsessions, war, prison, anarchy and disorder. We learn that “insomnia [was] a common complaint in the high-rise, almost an epidemic” (10); Dr Laing’s studio apartment on the 25th floor is called “an over-priced cell” (1); and the project is described as being based on “an architecture designed for war” (5).

The high-rise is like a vertical town with 1,000 apartments and 2,000 inhabitants. It contains a restaurant, a supermarket, a shopping centre, a bank and a hairdressing salon, two swimming-pools, a gymnasium and even a junior school for the few children in the block. Its structural perfection and (apparent) self-sufficiency are ghastly because they are unnatural. The complex hasn’t grown organically, as it happens in urban territories. It is the result of cool architectonic rationalisation and depends on highly technological mechanisms that are meant to replace human labour and satisfy each resident separately.

The high-rise was a huge machine designed to serve, not the collective body of tenants, but the individual resident in isolation. Its staff of air-conditioning conduits, elevators, garbage-disposal chutes and electrical switching systems provided a never-failing supply of care and attention that a century earlier would have needed an army of tireless servants (6).

The image of the “windowless monad” emerges again in this picture of a collective body made of parts that don’t communicate. One of the architects of the project, the elusive Anthony Royal, lives on top of the building, in one of the best apartments at the 40th floor. His evocative name recalls the figure of “lord of the manor” (100) in a sort of contemporary feudal system. The tower structure, which was supposed to form a homogeneous community of well-to-do professional middle-class tenants, engenders a new type of social conflict. Individualism prevails and cooperation is completely lost. A crazy system of privileges and precedence, based on floor height, is established. Disputes arise between people from different floors (lower-floor residents against upper-floor residents) or people with different life-styles (parents with children against dog-owners). The high-rise is not an organism, where every part is in the service of the whole, but an aggregate of multifaceted egoisms. Ballard’s vertical city is a metaphor of a non-ecological world, in that it soon reveals its unsustainability and encourages competition, social divisions and hierarchical verticalism. The hyper-technological structure is the triumph of instrumental reason, which leads its inhabitants to become “tools of their tools”.

The increasing disputes grow into a war of everybody against everybody else, the *homo homini lupus* condition that civilisation should have resolved (according to Freud) thanks to instinctual restriction. So, the high-rise turns into the emblem of a regression to a pre-civilised status where instinctual satisfaction dominates again. Some characters do come to the

⁴ The choice of his surname and his being a doctor are possibly a homage to R. D. Laing.

conclusion that this type of artificial environment has devastating effects on its inhabitants. Dr Laing realises that “this was an environment built not for man, but for man’s absence” (28) and Helen Wilder, points to the transformation undergone by the residents exclaiming that “It’s almost as if these aren’t the people who really live here” (18). Helen is obsessed with the idea that she and her children can be physically attacked at any time. Once more, while leaning against the parapet on the roof deck, Dr Laing describes the landscape in front of him as a projection of a psychic condition:

The cluster of auditorium roofs, curving roadway embankments and rectilinear curtain walling formed an intriguing medley of geometries – *less a habitable architecture*, he reflected, than the conscious diagram of *a mysterious psychic event* (28, my emphasis).

Previously, the skyline of the city of London, in its irregularity, had appeared as an “unresolved mental crisis” as opposed to the reassuring geometrical perfection of the complex. Now the futuristic architecture begins to appear unsuitable to human habitation and mysterious. The high-rise increasingly comes to embody the dystopian realisation of an architect’s experiment, functional on the paper but in fact detrimental to the vital necessities of human beings, which imply cross-cultural exchanges, cross-class socialisation, cross-generational encounters, and contact with natural elements.

Confined in this technocratic paradise, the residents undergo a de-humanising process which strips any trace of civilisation off them. Little by little any restraint is lost: altercations, retaliations, raids, looting, clan-formation, acts of vandalism, illicit liaisons, incest, violence of any kind are the norm. Ballard demonstrates that a hyper-technological development is no guarantee of an equivalent evolutionary process in its human beneficiaries. In this anarchic context the building turns into a dysfunctional structure, showing the extreme frailty of sophisticated mechanisms. Elevators and air conditioning are constantly out of order, the garbage chutes are blocked and the disposal system gets soon overloaded. The result is a life in extremely unhealthy conditions marked by suffocating heat, stagnation and miasma. In a short time Architect Royal has to admit that the building is moribund. However, this does not change his experimental attitude, which turns into a detached observation of the birth of a new social and psychological order (or disorder) within the structure. The architect, defined “a fallen angel” hovering over the residents (13) and a “lord of the manor” (100), is also frequently described as a colonial figure, wearing a white safari-jacket and accompanied by his Alsatian dog, an image recalling an imperial governor. It is no accident that the construction of the tower block is referred to by a resident as “an attempt to colonise the sky” (20): an indirect criticism of a hyper-scientific and technologised attitude towards the environment that has detrimental effects on humankind. The references to ruling figures of previous times (the feudal “lord of the manor” and the colonial governor) seem to underline a regression in patterns of political organisation. As in *Concrete Island*, the characters don’t leave their habitat but adjust to it. Instincts are set free. New aggregations and hierarchies are formed. The high-rise becomes an enclosed experimental microcosm of primitive regression.

Critics have often mentioned two major influences on Ballard’s fiction: his interest in psychology and psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung and R. D. Laing) and surrealist painting (Dalí,

Magritte, Ernst, De Chirico). As in surrealism, in Ballard's novels the "real" external world mirrors and evokes important patterns of human meanings: the inner, personal, often subconscious, self. This accounts for Ballard's depiction of reality in exaggerated and distorted images, his obsessive repetitive style, plots left hanging, and suggested rather than revealed underlying ideas. However, Ballard's paradoxical reality also evokes the inner crisis of a collective mind, a society that suffers from a "pathology of normalcy" and thanks to "consensual validation", in Fromm's terms, continues to perpetuate it.

In *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise* J. G. Ballard has imaginatively depicted reactions of the individuals to the pressures of technologised insane environments. The novels are "extreme metaphors", to use the title of a 2012 collection of interviews with the author. While posing problems, however, they don't offer solutions. But this was not Ballard's aim, as he said in an interview: "I am not offering a grand answer to all society's problems. I leave that to others. I'm issuing warnings" (Tew 2008: 118; quoted from Litt).

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