

CHAPTER FOUR

Labyrinths, Spirals, and Mazes: Riddles of Ballardian Time

“In a riddle whose answer is chess, what is the only prohibited word?”

I thought a moment and replied, “The word *chess*.”

Jorge Luis Borges, ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’ (*Labyrinths* 39)

J. G. Ballard’s career-spanning literary fixation with time and the expansive potentiality of the concepts’ overlapping manifestations (space time, aquatic time, terrestrial time, psychic time, wartime, ‘end times’, prehistoric time, etc.) has provoked its share of commentary – most notably, from the author himself. Andrzej Gasiorek observes that the theme of time is the author’s ‘most abiding concern’ (101) and quotes from an interview for *The Imagination on Trial* (1981) where Ballard states that his ‘first novels were obsessed with time, their real subject matter [...] is time, the finiteness of life’ (20). A prolific essayist, reviewer, interviewee and decisive critic of his own works, over the course of his lifetime Ballard authored only a handful of works of non-fiction that explicitly probe his preoccupation with time. Yet considering how frequently time is referenced in his short stories and novels (as a noun and adjective), it is surprising that Ballard did not dedicate more critical space to exploring a concept that is a central theme of his oeuvre. While frequently mentioned in interviews and reviews, primarily in relation to Surrealism, Ballard’s most in-depth investigations of time occur within the imaginative scope of his fiction. Perhaps, as in the above quote from Jorge Luis Borges’s *Labyrinths* (1962), ‘time’ is the answer to the Ballardian riddle – the unpronounceable, unspeakable named concept that permeates his fiction – but is under-recognised in his more analytical studies. However, to suggest that the Ballardian project can be ‘answered’ or encapsulated by one word is to miss a key facet of his works. As Gasiorek notes, ‘[a]mbiguity and ambivalence are the hallmarks’ of Ballard’s texts (26).¹⁸⁴ The eternal outsider – the anti-fantasy, anti-intergalactic, science fiction writer, the local foreigner in Shanghai and then Shepperton, the widely published and dismissed author –

¹⁸⁴ Gasiorek was stating this point in relation to Ballard’s short stories; however, I feel the idea of ‘ambiguity and ambivalence’ is a defining element of the author’s fiction more broadly.

Ballard resists classification, preferring to view himself as a chronicler of contemporary life, a prophetic voice narrating a ‘visionary present’ (*Complete Vol. 2* viii).¹⁸⁵

‘Time, Memory and Inner Space’ (1963) is a notable exception to the absence of explicit temporal engagement in Ballard’s essays. David Ian Paddy notes how this essay, along with Ballard’s manifesto ‘Which Way to Outer Space?’ (1962), have largely been discussed in the context of the emergence of New Wave science fiction (187). Paddy argues that these essays, as two of the author’s most frequently referenced works of non-fiction, should be read in relation to Ballard’s rich and formative biography. Certainly the first half of ‘Time, Memory and Inner Space’ is dominated by ‘landscapes of [Ballard’s] childhood’ and fuses much of the imagery in *The Drowned World* (1962) with his youth in Shanghai and his adulthood in London (*User’s Guide* 199). Yet the essay also provides important clues to understanding Ballard’s interest in time. In the essay, Ballard describes his idea of ‘inner space’, writing that

[t]he dream worlds invented by the writer of fantasy are external equivalents of the inner world of the psyche, and because these symbols take their impetus from the most formative and confused periods of our lives they are often time-sculptures of terrifying ambiguity.¹⁸⁶ (*User’s Guide* 200)

These ‘time-sculptures’ are objects in which personal memory has crystallised, superimposing a history of past experience upon the present. These deranged *lieux de mémoire* stand as monuments to time unforgotten, a memorial to thoughts that have retreated but have not been discarded. In this passage the intangible is made solid and substantial. For Ballard, memories can be shaped into structures that cast haunting shadows. Despite the familiarity and intimacy of memory, these artefacts are unstable spectres of ‘terrifying ambiguity’. These ‘time-sculptures’ are loci of creative inspiration. Within the essay the temporal is plasticised and memorialised.

¹⁸⁵ For more on Ballard as an ‘outsider-insider, or an insider-outsider’ see Toby Litt’s foreword to *J. G. Ballard* (2008), edited by Jeannette Baxter.

¹⁸⁶ Ballard later wrote that ‘[t]he images of surrealism are the iconography of inner space’ (*User’s Guide* 84).

As illustrated by 'Time, Memory and Inner Space', a unifying element of Ballard's literary explorations of temporality is an interest in time 'made visible'. A passage from Chapter 1 of *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) reveals this ambition overtly:

Marey's Chronograms. Dr Nathan passed the illustration across his desk to Margaret Travis. "Marey's Chronograms are multiple-exposure photographs in which the element of time is visible – the walking human figure, for example is represented as a series of dune-like lumps." Dr Nathan accepted a cigarette from Catherine Austin, who sauntered forward from the incubator at the rear of the office. Ignoring her quizzical eye, he continued, "Your husband's brilliant feat was to reverse the process. Using a series of photographs of the most commonplace objects – this office, let us say, a panorama of New York skyscrapers, the naked body of a woman, the face of a catatonic patient – he treated them as if they already were chronograms and *extracted* the element of time." Dr Nathan lit his cigarette with care. "The results were extraordinary. A very different world was revealed. The familiar surroundings of our lives, even our smallest gestures, were seen to have totally altered meanings".¹⁸⁷ (*Atrocity* 6)

Released from linearity, *Atrocity Exhibition*'s fragmented episodic and free associative formalism simultaneously experiments with narrative time and time as subject.¹⁸⁸ Time-bound notions of the realist narrative are suspended and spatialised by the work's 'juxtapositional' literary collage technique (Gasiorek 58).¹⁸⁹ Ballard claims that the text 'reconstitutes the late sixties almost *in toto*' and, unlike the restrictions found in 'conventional' novel making, the fragmentation of *Atrocity Exhibition* allows you to 'move about in time, you can move from realism to fantasy' (Burns and Sugnet 20). Underscoring this point, in the author's note for the 2001 edition, readers are instructed to read *Atrocity Exhibition* in whatever order they please. By skimming the pages and spontaneously arriving at attractive passages, the reader is told, 'the fog will clear, and the underlying narrative will reveal itself' (*Atrocity* vi). Gasiorek calls *Atrocity Exhibition* a suggestive 'Surrealist potpourri assembled out of found objects' (58). One of the 'speculative patterns or imagistic constellations' that the text manifests, and characteristically refuses to resolve, is the idea of time (Gasiorek 58). In the laboratory that is *Atrocity Exhibition*, time can be visualised and transformed into schema. The reader is told time can be '*extracted*', as if separated from its possessor ('commonplace objects') by centrifuge and pipette (*Atrocity* 6). The act of making time visible causes the eye of the

¹⁸⁷ Emphasis is the author's.

¹⁸⁸ Ballard objected to the term 'experimental writer' (Burns and Sugnet 25). However, for lack of a better phrase I will refer to works like *Atrocity Exhibition* as experimental.

¹⁸⁹ The formal elements of *Atrocity Exhibition* will be discussed in Chapter Five.

viewer to experience ‘a very different world’, where expectations about the mundane matter of our lives are defied and alternative ‘meanings’ are exposed (*Atrocity* 6). Another example of time ‘made visible’ in Ballard’s novels is *The Crystal World* (1966). Brian Baker argues that in the frozen jungle of *Crystal World* ‘time is the fourth dimension, [...] the jewelled armour that the crystallized subjects wear’ (18). In this novel time is “leak[ing]” away’, becoming a physical force that attaches itself and clings to things – animals, vegetation, buildings, people – instantly turning them into ‘stained glass’ (*Crystal* 85, 138). Instead of representing this mummifying process as solely catastrophic, Baker observes, Ballard dwells on the seduction of this mysterious advent, and its utopian allure to those living on the margins of society (17–18).

The image of ‘leaking time’ recalls Salvador Dalí’s famous painting *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), which Ballard held as a source of inspiration and referenced in works of fiction and non-fiction alike. In one of Ballard’s ‘book reviews’ for the science fiction magazine *New Worlds*, the author lists a number of ‘key surrealist paintings’ that he feels have importance for speculative fiction (*User’s Guide* 87). Included in this list is the aforementioned Dalí painting. Conjuring the barren landscape of the oil painting, Ballard writes that on the ‘empty beach’ of ‘utter psychic alienation’, ‘[c]lock time here is no longer valid’ (*User’s Guide* 87). The image of malleable, dripping, melting time is perhaps most fully developed in *Drowned World*. In Jeannette Baxter’s chapter ‘Mapping a Surrealist Historiography’, she observes that in *Drowned World* ‘[m]onuments to Western systems of chronology, linearity and order, the clocks stand limp and impotent’ (*Surrealist Imagination* 23). Baxter argues that in opposition to ‘temporal and historical ossification’, Ballard’s ‘Surrealist historiography’ allows for alternative means of narrating history and offers ‘alternative ways of confronting the past through art’ (*Surrealist Imagination* 23). Baxter also detects a tension between the symbols of conventional Western time and the drowned world’s

expanding 'spatio-temporal system' of "‘archeopsychic’ time" (*Drowned* 63; *Surrealist Imagination* 23).¹⁹⁰

Time is not just a symptom of Ballard's early career, abandoned in the early 1960s as the author suggests in his interview for *The Imagination on Trial*.¹⁹¹ Archival materials from the recently opened Papers of J. G. Ballard at the British Library emphasise how Ballard's interest in time 'made visible' extends from his early days as a short story writer, until at least a few years before his death.¹⁹² In this chapter I will look at how an early unpublished short story draft set in *Vermilion Sands* (c. 1958),¹⁹³ and correspondence between Ballard and the British filmmaker Tacita Dean (2007), bookend his career, providing new insight into the deep and abiding influence of time on his writings. These archival materials reference and echo themes developed in Ballard's first short story collection, *The Voices of Time and Other Stories* (1962), and in *Vermilion Sands*.¹⁹⁴ The latter collection of short stories was published in 1971, but the individual works date back to 1956 when the author's first story as a professional writer appeared in print.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ For more on Ballard's Surrealist time see *J. G. Ballard's Surrealist Imagination: Spectacular Authorship* (2009), particularly pages 23–25.

¹⁹¹ In this interview Ballard claims that while his early novels were 'obsessed with time', after the 'catalyst' of the JFK assassination the author shifted his focus. In the wake of this event 'the fictional elements of reality had begun to overwhelm the so-called "realistic" ones' and 'by the mid-sixties [...] we were living inside an enormous novel' (Burns and Sugnet 20). As already demonstrated with *Atrocity Exhibition*, the shift in Ballard's post-assassination literature did not divorce itself from time as subject or object.

¹⁹² The archive was acquired by the British Library (BL) in 2010 and opened to the public in the summer of 2011. It is not my intention to imply that Ballard discarded short form fiction after his career as a novelist took off. The author continued to regularly publish short stories into the 1990s. See Gasiorek pages 4–5 and 26–27.

¹⁹³ The BL has dated this unpublished draft from around 1958.

¹⁹⁴ In 1962 Ballard published his first two collections of short stories, *The Voices of Time and Other Stories* and *Billenium*. What is today called *The Voices of Time* was originally entitled *The Voices of Time and Other Stories* in 1962. The collection was then revised and published as *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare* in 1963. Short stories published in *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare* overlap with *Vermilion Sands*; some stories published in *Four-Dimensional Nightmare* were later removed ('Prima Belladonna' and 'Studio 5, The Stars'). The two stories then went on to appear in *Vermilion Sands*. The content of *The Voices of Time* (1984) is the same as the revised 1974 version of *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*, published by Victor Gollancz. Many of Ballard's short stories, initially published in science fiction magazines like *New Worlds Science Fiction*, were collected and re-collected over the years in varying book forms.

¹⁹⁵ It should be additionally noted that Ballard did publish a short story prior to what is widely regarded as his first short story, 'Prima Belladonna'. David Ian Paddy argues that 'The Violent Noon' (1951), a crime story published as the joint winner of a competition in Cambridge University's *Varsity*, needs to be considered as part of Ballard's oeuvre. See Chapter 10, 'Empires of the Mind: Autobiography and Anti-imperialism in the Work of J. G. Ballard', in *J. G. Ballard: Visions and Revisions*.

The titular short story, 'The Voices of Time' (1960), and an essay that Ballard wrote on the American earthwork sculptor Robert Smithson, were the prompt for his exchange of letters with Dean. In 1997 Dean made a 'failed' journey to Smithson's then submerged rock coil, the *Spiral Jetty* (1970), at Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, USA. She subsequently created a twenty-seven-minute sound work entitled *Trying to Find the Spiral Jetty* (1997), and contacted Ballard about her visit.¹⁹⁶ Ballard recounts their mutual fixation with Smithson in an essay called 'Time and Tacita Dean' that he wrote for the filmmaker's 2001 Tate Britain exhibition catalogue. Similarly, Dean paid posthumous homage to the author in a 2009 *Guardian* article, 'The Cosmic Clock with Ballard at its Core'.¹⁹⁷ In her tribute to him, Dean describes how her professional pursuit of 'time, cosmic and human, future and past, as well as in the analogue spooling of the now, has Ballard at its core' ('Cosmic Clock'). From her Donald Crowhurst sea odyssey film, to the twenty-four hour acoustic overlapping of multiple global locales in *Friday/Saturday* (2000), to the charting of the sun during a solar eclipse in *Diamond Ring* (2002), each work reflects Dean and Ballard's mutual interest in the subjectivity of time and alternative means of representing, recording and consuming time other than by the meter of conventional linear chronology and clock time.¹⁹⁸ In 'Cosmograms of the Present Tense' (2006), Jean-Christophe Royoux describes how a thread running through Dean's work is a 'distrust [in] the mathematical representation of time as something that can be abstractly measured' (74). Written in the same year as Dean's Utah exploration, Ballard's Smithson essay 'Robert Smithson as Cargo Cultist' (1997) is a place where the author clearly articulates his understanding of visible time. While this essay is very brief, Ballard's

¹⁹⁶ The precise chronology and specific nature of Ballard and Dean's first meeting and Smithson-related communication are unclear. Dean implies that Ballard first initiated communication with her about Smithson's work by letter, after presumably reading about her *Spiral Jetty* related sound work ('Cosmic Clock'). Yet in 'Time and Tacita Dean' Ballard claims that it was Dean who contacted him about their common interest in Smithson (Gallery 33). In an interview with the art critic and curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, Ballard states that he first met Dean at a Tate Modern opening party (63–64).

¹⁹⁷ More recently, Dean created a film project honouring Ballard entitled *JG* (2013). Using her correspondence with Ballard as a point of inspiration, the film returns to the themes of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* and 'The Voices of Time'.

¹⁹⁸ Dean's film about Donald Crowhurst, *Disappearance at Sea* (1996), is perhaps her best-known artwork. In this film Dean explores the travails of Crowhurst, an obsessive yachtsman who disappeared at sea in 1969 after unsuccessfully attempting to be the first to sail around the world non-stop. While there are a good number of readily available books on Dean's artwork, unfortunately viewing her films is challenging since there is no publicly available collection of her filmic works.

correspondence with Dean demonstrates his continued interest in Smithson, particularly the artist's black basalt rock and earth *Spiral Jetty*. Across the aforementioned short stories and essays by Ballard, a motif of visible time emerges: the labyrinth, the spiral, the maze.¹⁹⁹

Ballard treated these structures where 'time is spatialized' as relatively interchangeable architectural phenomena – although there are differences in meaning and history between these constructions, which will be explored in this chapter (Baker 17).²⁰⁰ In *From Modernism to Postmodernism* (2005) Gerhard Hoffmann boldly declares that '[t]he central metaphor for postmodern fiction, the crucial figuration for its content, design, narrative strategies, the paradoxicality of its intention and goal is spatial: it is the *labyrinth*' (414).²⁰¹ But for Ballard the labyrinth is not solely a spatial metaphor or narrative tool. For the author, it is the labyrinth (or maze) as *built structure*, with its attendant physicality, that in part imbues it with temporal power and meaning.

The Labyrinth as Structure – Built and Unbuilt

In Hermann Kern's ambitious tome *Through the Labyrinth: Designs and Meanings Over 5,000 Years* (2000),²⁰² the art historian draws specific distinctions between labyrinths and mazes. He explains that currently the term 'labyrinth' has three manifestations: 1) a literary motif, 2) a pattern of movement, 3) a graphic figure/drawing (23, 27). Kern observes that in common parlance 'labyrinth' is most frequently employed as a metaphor. Associated since late antiquity with the idea of the 'maze' ('a tortuous structure [...] a building or a garden [...] that offers the walker many paths'), the proverbial usage of the labyrinth refers to something that is 'unclear, confusing', or difficult to navigate and comprehend (23). Kern claims that

¹⁹⁹ References to mazes and labyrinthine structures can be located across Ballard's writings. This enduring interest can be seen, for example, in *Atrocity Exhibition* ('**The Image Maze**. [...] Beyond a tableau sculpture of a Saigon street execution stood a maze constructed from photographic billboards' [22]), *Concrete Island* ('Gazing up at the maze of concrete causeways illuminated in the night air, he realized how much he loathed all these drivers and their vehicles' [20]), and *High-Rise* ('moving up and down a maze of corridors on the borders of hostile enclaves' [65]).

²⁰⁰ Baker notes how in *Crystal World*, as well as in other later works by Ballard, 'time is spatialized' (17).

²⁰¹ Emphasis is the author's.

²⁰² *Through the Labyrinth* was first published in German in 1982. The 2000 English edition is translated and revised.

assumptions of the labyrinth/maze as obfuscation stems from third century B.C. written accounts, which use the concept as a literary motif (23). Focusing on the visual tradition of labyrinths, Kern's authoritative study formally defines labyrinths as possessing an identifiable centre accessible by a single path (unicursal), while mazes can have more than one entrance, branching passageways, and often contain dead-ends and multiple 'false' paths (multicursal).²⁰³ According to Kern's taxonomy, all labyrinths have one continual route from the outside that inevitably leads to its centre, whereas a maze has more than one possible route to its core. A key difference between these two concepts is that multicursal mazes emphasise choice – the enterer has to select the correct path and overcome detours – confusion and misdirection is part of the intended design. Yet while the unicursal labyrinth involves a single route that leads from the entrance to centre, this path is not linear – unicursal labyrinths traditionally have multiple concentric 'circuits' or paths. Kern points out that the experience of walking a labyrinth is not one of conventional goal-oriented achievement – 'success is a natural consequence of the path's design' (Kern 316). Without the distractions of choice-making and risk-taking within the labyrinth, the walker may focus internally and on the experience of the journey itself. The labyrinth is a place of time suspension and meditation. Since progress is guaranteed, one may succumb to the space and its eventual beginning and end. The process of exiting a unicursal labyrinth involves retracing steps, an activity demanding patience and a potential opportunity to move in a reflective state. The only true dead-end in a labyrinth, Kern writes, 'is at its center' (23). Conversely, to reach the centre of a maze, agility and attention to 'externals' are required of the walker (Kern 316); the participant of the maze must actively decipher his or her surroundings. In Western culture there are two primary types of formal labyrinths: classical, also known as Cretan, and medieval. The former consists of seven concentric 'circuits' and the latter has eleven. Kern observes that as a graphic form, 'like the ground plan of a building', labyrinths can only be

²⁰³ It appears that W. H. Mathews is responsible for inventing the 'unicursal' and 'multicursal' system of labyrinth classification. In fact the OED's earliest reference for the latter term is Mathews's *Mazes and Labyrinths*. See Mathews's analysis of the forms of labyrinth design on pages 184–92.

fully ‘understood’ from an elevated vantage point (23).²⁰⁴ Craig Wright in *The Maze and the Warrior* (2001) explains that the multicursal maze ‘requires logic to solve a puzzle; [the unicursal labyrinth] demands faith to attain a goal’ (3). Kern notes how labyrinths are often conflated with other graphic forms, such as spirals, meanders, and knots/woven patterns. All of these figures are defined by the ‘positive spatial elements’ of their ‘delineating walls’ or outlines (23). ‘In contrast’, Kern writes, ‘the most important feature of the labyrinth are not the lines that form the walls, but the negative space of the path formed by those lines, which determines the pattern of movement’ (23). Labyrinths also differ from spirals, in that the former are ‘almost completely enclosed by an outer line and [...] their paths are subject to a continual, pendular change of direction’ (Kern 23). Despite this, according to Kern, commonality does exist between labyrinths and spirals. Both forms lack intersecting paths and direct towards a single destination, although the manner in which labyrinths and spirals articulate their vertiginous layouts differs (Kern 23).

Some theorists of labyrinths and mazes, however, treat the two terms as equivalent. For example, W. H. Matthews writes in his introduction to *Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of Their History and Developments* (1922) that the difference between ‘maze’ and ‘labyrinth’ is ‘little or none’ (1). Borges, the most famous ‘maker’ of labyrinths in twentieth-century literature, also struggled to find clear distinctions between the two terms. In an interview with Richard Burgin, Borges somewhat equivocally states that ‘[p]erhaps the word labyrinth is more mysterious than the word maze. [Y]ou feel the “amazement” in the word [maze]. With labyrinth you think of Crete and you think of the Greeks. While in maze you may think of Hampton Court’ (16). For Borges, it would appear that the potent magic of the image of the labyrinth – and his repetitive employment of the word – is due to its malleable connotation with ambiguity, danger and myth. Similar to Matthews, Wright also elects to use the terms ‘maze’ and ‘labyrinth’ interchangeably, though he draws attention to their etymological differences (4). Wright recounts that while the majority of Romance languages

²⁰⁴ Presumably, a similar argument could be made about mazes, although Kern does not attempt such a comparison.

have ‘only a single word for this object’, which derives from the Latin *labyrinthus* (a word that some scholars believe is ‘distantly related’ to a Greek word meaning ‘double axe’), since at least around the fourteenth century the English language has also employed ‘maze’ (4). The word ‘maze’ ostensibly derives from Scandinavian origins, meaning confusion or bewilderment (Shiloh 90–91). In the West, before the emergence of the Renaissance garden maze, most labyrinths were unicursal. Wright notes how popular contemporary understanding of mazes as ‘repeated choice and false turnings [...] is a rather late development’ (3). Yet Wright, in contrast to Kern, explains that the seduction of these structures shares common ground; multicursal and unicursal mazes are ‘goal-oriented challenge[s], a linear quest, no matter how tortuous the route. The eternal allure of the maze is the seemingly unattainable center’ (3). Importantly, both structures signal voyages into the unknown and anticipate return.

In Baxter’s chapter ‘Visions of Europe in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes*’ (2008) she observes how Ballard’s ‘The Concentration City’ (1957) depicts Europe as a ‘vast urban labyrinth [...] [a]nticipating the material and ideological partitions which made up real Cold War geographies’ (‘Visions of Europe’ 94). The short story features a dense topography of mammoth, tiered housing developments and winding passageways. The protagonist, Franz M., attempts to apply the logic of coordinates and move ‘westbound’ searching for the ‘City’s end’, only to be rerouted back in time to his original location and date of departure (*Complete Vol. I* 43–44).²⁰⁵ In a land devoid of ‘[f]ree space’ – in the sense of ‘free’ as without cost and ‘free’ as in available – Franz M. dreams of the soaring freedom of flight, but is ultimately unable to escape the claustrophobic crush of what is revealed to be a walled city (*Complete Vol. I* 38). Anticipating the suffocating anxiety and police state paranoia of Ballard’s 1962 short story ‘The Watch-Towers’, the ‘Concentration City’ is a sprawling prison, full of cumbersomely long numerical addresses, abrupt barriers and curving detours. Although never explicitly named a ‘labyrinth’ by Ballard, to Baxter the story recounts how ‘[i]n the postwar

²⁰⁵ This ‘merry-go-round’ of time or repetition of time already past recalls Ballard’s 1956 short story ‘Escapement’ (*Complete Vol. I* 25).

European labyrinth, time and space have formed a capitalist alliance based on confusion and incarceration' ('Visions of Europe' 95).²⁰⁶

In a paper given at the 2010 Royal Academy symposium 'Ballardian Architecture: Inner and Outer Space', Matthew Taunton identifies a similar connection between modernist urbanism and Taylorism in Ballard's short story 'Chronopolis' (1960), which was later collected in *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare* and the 1971 *Chronopolis and Other Stories* (Taunton).²⁰⁷ Also set in an expansive city, 'Chronopolis' tells of a culture where temporal control, as a means of increasing productivity and social management, is so threatening that time itself has become restricted. Clocks are illegal because of their potential to be used as a metric for monitoring economic efficiency. The protagonist, Newman, is warned that once you can time a person doing something, 'Then you can make him do it faster' (*Voices* 178). All independent means of telling precise time, such as clocks and watches, have been banished. Ominously, the reader is told that the 'Time Police' are rumoured to patrol the streets 'watching for any outbreak' (*Voices* 175). Time has been rejected and left behind in Chronopolis, the 'Time City' – a congested abandoned 'future' urban space of tall apartment blocks with 'identical living units' and colour-coded professional '[t]ime zones' (*Voices* 183–84).²⁰⁸ Newman and his family reside in the comparative safety of the 'amorphous' suburban 'zone of endless afternoons', where '[t]ime unfolded at its usual sluggish, half-confused pace' (*Voices* 175). Ultimately, the story reveals time as both a means of temporary liberation and eventual punishment. While awaiting his trial, Newman frantically charts time by dividing his south-facing jail wall into segments, thus creating a sundial. Newman, ironically, is only permitted a working clock once he is sentenced and incarcerated for murder and 'offences under the Time Laws' (*Voices* 195). At first he is elated by the discovery of a functioning

²⁰⁶ Ballard does, however, use the word 'maze' within the story's text: 'Hundreds of elevator shafts sank through the station and the maze of platforms, escalators, restaurants, hotels and theatres seemed like an exaggerated replica of the City itself' (*Complete Vol. 1* 43).

²⁰⁷ *Chronopolis and Other Stories* also featured additional short stories that were published in *The Voices of Time and Other Stories* and *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*. These stories include, 'The Voices of Time', 'The Garden of Time', and 'The Sound-Sweep'.

²⁰⁸ Newman observes that when entering Chronopolis '[t]hey were moving forward in time rather than [...] back into the past of a fossil city' (183).

timepiece in his sunlight-deprived cell, only to be overwhelmed by the unrelenting ticking of the minute-by-minute jerking clock. The concluding ellipsis of the story leads the reader to know that this once ‘insanely irritating tick’, with time, will build into a gothic thundering of rhythmic monotony (*Voices* 197); Newman’s mental breakdown is all but guaranteed. With cold Ballardian certainty, the reader knows Newman’s prison cell will likely become his psychiatric patient room.

In ‘What I Believe’ (1984), a work popularly referred to as a prose poem, but also called an ‘incantatory manifesto’ by Iain Sinclair (*Ghost Milk* 229) and ‘the uncategorisable text’ by John Baxter (273), Ballard echoes the sinister malaise of the passing of time found in ‘Chronopolis’. In his uncharacteristically lyrical statement Ballard writes:

I believe in the death of tomorrow, in the exhaustion of time, in our search for a new time within the smiles of auto-route waitresses and the tired eyes of air-traffic controllers at out-of-season airports.

[...]

I believe in [...] the boredom of afternoons, the fear of calendars, the treachery of clocks. (*J.G. Ballard* 176)

Although written twenty-four years later, the last line of this passage recollects the ‘zone of endless afternoons’ of ‘Chronopolis’ (*Voices* 175). Yet the ‘sluggish, half-confused pace’ of suburban time has been partially renegotiated (*Voices* 175). Instead, conventional clocks have been circumvented, and Ballard envisions spatio-temporal anxiety and the lurking possibilities of ‘new’ formulas of temporality.

It is the mechanical movement of Newman’s clock – its internal mechanism of moving parts – that generates the persistent rhythmic sound. Underscoring time’s connection with the idea of ‘movement’, a key principle of labyrinths and mazes as mentioned previously in regard to physical or bodily movement, Newman is plagued by the forward march of time despite his imprisoned state. Returning to Kern’s theorisation of labyrinths and movement, the art historian is highly sceptical of other scholars’ attempts to link labyrinths with a different

type of movement – that of the sun.²⁰⁹ Kern names Herman Wirth as ‘the first [to] attempt to coordinate the sun’s movement with the path of a labyrinth’ (33). He especially questions Wirth’s efforts to associate labyrinths with sundials, noting that the necessary horizontal bifurcation of a sundial creates not a labyrinth but an ‘upper semicircle [...] that does not lead to [a] center in successive circuits’ (33). However, using archaeological evidence, Kern does identify certain artefacts that ‘indicate [that] ideas relating to the sun were associated with labyrinths’ (33). He points to Knossos coins between the sixth and fourth centuries which initially had swastikas and swastika meanders emblazoned upon them (representing the rotating wheel of the sun), but over generations became replaced by depictions of labyrinths and the Minotaur (33). Kern additionally notes that stars were also illustrated on some of these coins, giving ‘credence to an astral interpretation’ (33). Despite his earlier dismissal of other scholarly work, Kern concludes that while he is not yet in the position to fully substantiate such a theory, he intuitively recognises that there is a connection between ‘the labyrinth design and the movement of heavenly bodies’ (33). With more than a note of melancholy, Kern pledges to elucidate his conviction in future research.

‘The Voices of Time’ seizes upon the idea of labyrinths and ‘the movement of heavenly bodies’. Indeed the short story culminates with the involuntary, frantic building of a mandala (‘like a cosmic clock’) by the experimental scientist protagonist, Powers (*Voices* 39). Like many of his narcoleptic patients, Powers gradually detaches from the cycles and movements of circadian rhythms, setting himself adrift from declining planetary life. Convinced that evolution has peaked and cellular, molecular and chemical life are counting down to extinction, Powers is hypnotically propelled to create a mandala out of mixed cement and sand. The narrator reports on Powers’s progress:

The outer circle was now almost complete. [...] Three concentric circles, the largest a hundred yards in diameter, separated from each other by ten-foot intervals, formed the rim of the device, divided into four segments by the arms of an enormous cross radiating from its centre, where a small round platform had been built a foot above the ground.

²⁰⁹ Kern recounts how scholars of labyrinths, such as Friedrich Creuzer, Franz Mone, and James Frazer, have referenced ‘a sun dance: the labyrinth dance as an imitation of the sun’s movement over a year’s time’ (33).

Powers worked swiftly, pouring sand and cement into the mixer. (*Voices* 35–36)

What better space to watch and hear the twinkle of the universe countdown to zero than from the elevated platform of a vertiginous concrete vessel, ‘the gigantic cipher’ (*Voices* 36)? For Ballard there is no more suitable structure for the advent of cosmic unravelling than the labyrinth. Powers is propelled to build a labyrinthine mandala as a mechanism for cosmological study and observation. It is through the structure’s design and meaning that he accesses celestial phenomena.

Meaning ‘circle’ in Sanskrit, the mandala carries a variety of cultural and religious significances.²¹⁰ For example, they are used in ‘initiator ceremonies [...] [as] a representation of [...] creation itself’, as ‘visual scripture’ sand paintings symbolising impermanence, and for meditation (Leeming 251; Bryant 21). Generally associated with Eastern cultures, mandalas often operate as a ‘representation of sacred wholeness or significance’ (251). Despite some differences, there is symmetry between mandalas and labyrinths. As David Leeming points out, ‘a mandala can be a kind of [...] labyrinth through which the initiate or [...] pilgrim must pass in order to achieve union with the “center,” which is the [...] supreme deity’ (251). Additionally, Leeming notes that some religious temples are

arranged architecturally as mandalas, suggesting the pilgrimage into the center aspect of various communal liturgies. Mandalas, then, are in a sense dwelling places of the absolute, and they are always sources of or containers of spiritual or divine power in a given ritual (251).

Once the ‘ritual’ structure is completed, in ‘The Voices of Time’, Powers undertakes his own cosmic journey into the mandala:

He parked the car beside the mandala and walked slowly towards the outer concrete rim curving away into the shadows. Above him he could hear the stars, a million cosmic voices that crowded the sky from the horizon to the next, a true canopy of time. (*Voices* 39)

The architectural space of Powers’s mandala is both open-air theatre, in the Greco-Roman tradition, where the sky is the stage for the great historical event and a conduit of eventual negativity. Powers listens to the ‘time-song of a thousand galaxies overlaying each other in

²¹⁰ Despite its etymological origins mandalas can appear in differing geometric form. For a list of mandalas’ varying cultural and religious incarnations, see the entry for mandalas in *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology* by David Leeming, page 251.

his mind', and then walks into 'the inner circle of the mandala' where the voices dissolve into a 'single stronger voice' (*Voices* 39). Powers dies in this location. The reader is told he was swept away into 'the broadening reaches of the river of eternity' (*Voices* 40).

Like many of Ballard's texts, particularly the early career works, the narrative is consumed by entropy, a concept that was also significant to Smithson's creative imagination. Dean observes that within 'The Voices of Time' and Ballard's Smithson-related works, 'there is an amalgam of an idea for a project in relation to the sun and to time and to obsolescence'.²¹¹ Ballard was less concerned with Thomas Pynchon's 'conflict between the entropy of information and the entropy of thermodynamics' (41), which according to Tony Tanner is the underlying meaning of *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), than with social entropy – 'the gradual [...] degeneration of the human species' (Gasiorek 48).²¹² Yet, especially in Ballard's early works, there are gestures towards other definitions of entropy. Ballard's early 'environmental' disaster novels and short stories, works that could be classified as more conventional science fiction, exhibit a more direct interest in cosmic entropy. Interestingly, Fredric Jameson detects a nuanced postcolonial subtext for Ballard's entropic interests.

'Ballard's work', Jameson writes,

is suggestive in the way in which he translates both physical and moral dissolution into the great ideological myth of entropy, in which the historic collapse of the British Empire is projected outwards into some immense cosmic declaration of the universe itself as well as of its molecular building blocks. (*Archaeologies* 269)

Jameson's analysis of Ballard joins social entropy with cosmic entropy, two distinct points on a continuum. Acting as a timeline, entropy itself is a means of assessing time. Stephen Hawking explains that one's subjective sense of time, 'the psychological arrow of time', is the same as the thermodynamic arrow of time, 'the direction in which entropy increases'.

Hawking writes:

Thus, in a universe in which entropy was decreasing with time, any intelligent beings would also have a subjective sense of time that was backward. So the second law of thermodynamics is really a tautology. Entropy increases with time because we define the direction of time to be that in which entropy increases. (268)

²¹¹ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library.

²¹² Despite having famously named a short story 'Entropy' (1960), Pynchon claimed to not fully understand the concept (Herman 22–23).

This, in part, explains Powers's involuntary mandala-building: presumably, his psychological arrow of time tells him that a temporal shift is taking place. In 'The House of Light and Entropy: Inhabiting the American Desert' (2000), Alessandra Ponte examines how Smithson used science fiction 'to formulate a new aesthetic' (151). She comments on Smithson's interest in Ballard and states that the artist did not conceive of the megaliths in Ballard's texts as the conjurings of merely science fiction. To Smithson, the structures were representations of 'a new kind of monumentality' (Ponte 151). Paraphrasing Smithson's essay 'Entropy and the New Monuments' (1966), Ponte writes that these 'new monuments celebrated an "inactive history", the future as the "obsolete in reverse", the universe transformed into an "all-encompassing sameness". What in physics is called entropy' (151).²¹³ Ballard's megaliths are evocative of a new temporal elasticity – one that disrupts the arrow of time and revises intuitive understandings of the past, present and future. Smithson was captivated by this temporal flexibility, and positioned many of his works at a crossroads between ancient history and visionary future. Within this new equilibrated space, fantastic and unexpected events can occur – the Minotaur can sail his time-ship to the barrens of Utah and galaxies can sing.

While never using the word 'entropy', Kaldren, a former patient of Powers who underwent experimental treatment, grasps the scientist's arm and dramatically prophesises impending social and planetary termination:

"You're not alone, Powers don't think you are. These are the voices of time, and they're all saying good-bye to you. Think of yourself in a wider context. Every particle in your body, every grain of sand, every galaxy carries the same signature. As you've just said, you know what the time is now, so what does the rest matter? There's no need to go on looking at the clock".
(*Voices* 35)

Similar to the alternative potentiality that many of Smithson's works proffer, Gasiorek recognises that Powers's 'awareness of entropy results in an entirely different way of conceiving temporality, enabling him to "explore the lateral byways now, the side doors, as it

²¹³ In an interview about two months before his death, Smithson spoke at length on the subject of entropy. Published posthumously, the interview entitled 'Entropy Made Visible' (1973) moves from one concept of entropy to another, exploring various intersecting manifestations of the idea. See 'Entropy Made Visible' in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Ed. Jack D. Flam (London: University of California Press, 1996) 301–09.

were, in the corridors of time” (48).²¹⁴ By architecturalising time, Ballard gives shape and contours to an intangible but universal and potent force. Lending time spatiality, he also strengthens the physical and psychic power of time, seemingly imbuing it with the force to kill, or at the very least absorb Powers into another realm.

Dwelling on the temporal messages of Ballard’s short story, Jameson observes:

[I]n a postmodern age [...] if temporality still has its place, it would seem better to speak of the writing of it than of any lived experience.

The writing of time, its enregisterment: such is the lesson, [...] [in] [...] “Voices of Time,” whose apocalyptic vision [is] of the imminent end of the cosmos itself, running down like an unwound clock, and of the human race terminating in sleep [...]. [W]hat Ballard works on linguistically are, in fact, the multiple signatures of Time itself, which his own writing reads: as in the specimens and exhibitions of his hero’s temporal zoo or terminal laboratory. (*Postmodernism, Or* 154–55)

The plurality of Ballardian time encapsulates an aspect of the postmodern condition, an ‘age’ where, like Ballard’s short story, time has become unmounted from its axis, frenetically spinning into nothingness. Jameson’s reading of Ballard indicates that the author’s own writings ‘linguistically are [...] the multiple signatures of Time itself’, suggesting that Ballard’s literary technique possesses a recognisable hallmark of time (*Postmodernism, Or* 155). Perhaps for Jameson, at any given moment when the postmodern reader wants to know what the time is, it is better to look at Ballard’s texts than at any conventional timepiece. As Kaldren informs us, ‘There’s no need to go on looking at the clock’ (*Voices* 35).

Quoting from ‘The Voices of Time’, Jameson notes how the fauna and flora that reside in Powers’s captivity are in a state of decline and emphasise the idea that time itself is outmoded; the cosmos must end in order to allow for the possibility of restarting time.

[T]he sunflower now living the *longue durée* of geological epochs (“it literally *sees* time. The older the surrounding environment, the more sluggish its metabolism” [...]) and finally, above all DNA itself, that ultimate script, which is literally deteriorating: “The ribonucleic acid templates which unravel the protein chains in all living organisms are wearing out, the dies enscripting [sic] the protoplasmic signatures have become blunted. After all, they’ve been running now for over a thousand million years. It’s time to retool [sic]”. (*Postmodernism, Or* 155)

‘The Voices of Time’ proposes that these plants are potentially ‘of the future’. Although Powers admits that if this hypothesis is true, ‘their world must be a monstrous surrealist one’

²¹⁴ In this passage Gasiorek is quoting from what is page 11 of ‘The Voices of Time’ in the Orion edition.

(*Voices* 21). Jameson declares that in ‘The Voices of Time’, ‘[i]t is not merely on the inner clock of the organism that time can be read: the galaxies themselves literally speak it’ (*Postmodernism, Or* 155).²¹⁵ The ending of time, as we are ‘traditionally accustomed’ to it, is depicted by Ballard as a sonorous, gradual, reverse Big Bang composed of vocalised cosmic poetics rather than explosions.

In Jeannette Baxter’s ‘Visions of Europe in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes*’, essays by Georges Bataille are used to open up a discussion about Ballard’s shifting imaginings of European socio-political isolation and extremism. Bataille’s ‘The Labyrinth’ (1936) is given particular emphasis within this study. Demonstrating Ballard’s sustained interest in the changing terrains of mid to late twentieth-century Europe, Baxter traces the author’s ‘[n]arratives of spatio-temporal, physical and psychological dislocation’ from ‘The Concentration City’ to *Vermilion Sands*, and ultimately to *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000) (‘Visions of Europe’ 95). Drawing on T. J. Demos’s essay ‘Duchamp’s Labyrinth: First Papers of Surrealism, 1942’ (2001), Baxter notes that Bataille’s essay is ‘[a]n exploration, in part, of the relationship between language and Being, [as well as] a meditation on the composition and decomposition of communities between the Wars’ (‘Visions of Europe’ 96). Writing from the perspective of a ‘disoriented’ late 1930s Europe, Demos writes that Bataille explores the ‘fully radicalized elements of the labyrinth’ (114). For Bataille, the labyrinth is a ‘foggy’ place of ‘negativity’, a ‘NOWHERE’ (171–74); a location of ‘[s]patial, psychic, and linguistic [...] dislocation where all is submitted to an utter contingency upon its decentering frame’ (Demos 115). Bataille’s spatialised image of fragile wartime instability also implies a state of suspended temporality. There is no movement forwards or backwards; Bataille’s ‘negative’ labyrinth is without logic or destination. Benjamin Noys states, ‘[t]he labyrinth is no longer a maze which has a potential of actual solution, but is a “space” without

²¹⁵ Emphasis is the author’s. The passages in ‘The Voices of Time’ that Jameson quotes from are on pages 21 and 24, respectively, of the Phoenix edition cited in this chapter.

an entrance, an exit or a centre' (14). '[N]othing is so frightening as a labyrinth with no center', Borges writes in his brief review of *Citizen Kane* (*Non-Fictions* 259).²¹⁶

Citing the French theorist's association of architecture and the 'authority of church and state', Demos argues that, for Bataille, the labyrinth is situated *in opposition* to architecture (114). Bataille's vision of architecture is of order and logic, while the labyrinth is characterised by 'homelessness' and destabilisation (Demos 114). The entry for 'Architecture' (1929), in Bataille's incomplete 'Critical Dictionary' for his Surrealist art magazine *Documents*, first states that architecture is the 'physiognomy' of society, but then declares that '[i]n practice, only the ideal being of society, that which orders and prohibits with authority, expresses itself in what are architectural compositions' (Leach 21).²¹⁷

Bataille's metaphorical labyrinth cannot be architectural, since it symbolises a distinctly 'unordered' negative space of loss and disorientation. Denis Hollier, in *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (1989), claims that the labyrinth is unmappable and indescribable, not an 'object' or structure devised by man – '[t]he legend of Dedalus representing the labyrinth as a human creation must be forgotten' – but instead 'a traversal' embodying Bataille's labyrinthine writings themselves (58). Hollier notes that one cannot 'follow' Bataille into "his" labyrinth'; all potential entrants access the shifting ambiguous space alone (58, 61). Despite an overlapping of language, Bataille's 'oppositional' labyrinth should not be interpreted as having commonality with Kern's definition of labyrinths. Recall Kern's observation that 'the most important feature of the labyrinth are not the lines that form the walls, but the negative space of the path formed by those lines, which determines the pattern of movement' (23). The negativity of Bataille's labyrinth is due to its features of nothingness and disorientation; Kern's 'negative space' is a definitively geographical one, fixing the spatial relationship between labyrinth walker, surrounding walls and the ground

²¹⁶ Borges attributes this quote to G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown. In fact, the reference is from Chesterton's 1913 'The Head of Caesar' and more accurately states, 'What we all dread most [...] is a maze with *no* centre', reaffirming the interchangeability of labyrinths and mazes to Borges (*Father Brown* 235).

²¹⁷ Although initially associated with the movement, Bataille had a tentative relationship with Surrealism. Many of his views differed from those of André Breton, causing the philosopher to describe himself as 'an enemy from within' Surrealism (Jones).

beneath his or her feet. Similar to Ballard's distorted mandala in 'The Voices of Time', where the mandala is not a location of creation but a conduit of end times, Bataille's labyrinth is inverted: it is place of destabilisation rather than a location of discovery.

Ballard's conceptualisation of labyrinths, however, is distinctly architectural, and is derived from the ancient Greek myth of Daedalus and the Minotaur – a story I will return to shortly. Unlike Bataille, for Ballard the instability of the 'only truly alien planet', earth, can be embodied by structural edifices (*User's Guide* 197). The monumentality of these structures is, to a certain degree, an illusion; Ballard's works routinely conduct forensic examinations of the delicate 'skin' of urban and suburban calm, revealing fissures and scabs imperceptible to the naked eye. His representations of buildings, most notably in the Le Corbusier-inspired *High-Rise* (1975), are haunting and craft a powerful commentary on the deterministic relationship between a building and its occupants. Ballard's architectural understanding of labyrinths is clearly revealed in his correspondence with photographer and filmmaker Tacita Dean. In Ballard's 22 October 2007 letter to Dean on the subject of the land art of Robert Smithson, the author writes:

Firstly, why a spiral jetty? What conceivable cargo would require a spiral jetty for its loading/unloading? Either Smithson was serious, or the jetty is just a 10,000-ton doodle with no particular significance. I prefer to think that Smithson was serious. My guess is that the cargo was a clock, of a very special kind. In their way, all clocks are labyrinths, and can be risky to enter.

Smithson's clock, landed at the spiral jetty, would have brought the gift of time to this Utah desert, where time hasn't existed for hundreds of millions of years. The jetty is a proto-labyrinth, and spirals have always stood for labyrinths for thousands of years in ancient art and architecture. So there's a tie-in with the minotaur. By building the jetty, Smithson plays the role of Daedalus, *the architect hero* who was going to crack the labyrinth, using the thread of time to find his way out.²¹⁸

Attached to Ballard's letter to Dean is a copy of the author's short essay 'Robert Smithson as Cargo Cultist', which he wrote for a collection of writings on the artist for the Pierogi Gallery in New York. Connecting this work of non-fiction to 'The Voices of Time', Ballard writes to Dean: 'You mentioned my story The Voices of Time, and this Smithson piece contains most of its themes, I think'.²¹⁹ Ballard's 'Robert Smithson as Cargo Cultist' does reflect a similar

²¹⁸ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library. Emphasis is my own.

²¹⁹ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library.

understanding of Smithson's land works as his letter to Dean. The essay describes how the stopped time of Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah seems to have occurred 'during a geological ellipsis that has lasted for hundreds of millions of years' ('Cargo Cultist'). Ballard speculates how, '[o]ne can only imagine the craft captained by a rare navigator, a minotaur obsessed by inexplicable geometries, who had commissioned Smithson to serve as his architect and devise this labyrinth in the guise of a cargo terminal' ('Cargo Cultist'). In both the above excerpt from Ballard's letter to Dean and in his essay on Smithson, the author refers to the Greek myth of Daedalus and the Minotaur.²²⁰ Significantly, Ballard recognises Daedalus as 'the architect hero', who is intent upon deciphering the labyrinth by 'using the thread of time to find his way out'.²²¹ In Cretan myth, Zeus and Europa's eldest son, Minos, marries Pasiphaë (the daughter of the sun-god Helios) and prays to the sea-god Poseidon to consecrate his entitlement to kinship by sending a bull from the sea for him to sacrifice. Poseidon answered this request, but the bull that appears is white and too attractive for Minos to kill. Angered, Poseidon aroused a sexual desire in Pasiphaë who turned to Daedalus to assist her longings by constructing a costume that would allow her to copulate with the bull while concealed. These sexual acts resulted in an 'monstrous offspring named Asterion, who was human in body but had the head of a bull: the bull of Minos or 'Minotaurus' (Ziolkowski 69). Humiliated by this creature, Minos instructed Daedalus – Ballard's 'architect hero' – to build a labyrinth to contain the Minotaur, so that the restricted beast could feed annually on supplies of sacrificial youths and maidens.

In the twentieth century, the labyrinth and the Minotaur myth held particular fascination for the Surrealists. Both subjects appear frequently in Surrealist works of art from the 1930s and '40s, and *Minotaure* was the title of a Parisian Surrealist journal published from

²²⁰ Ballard also referenced the minotaur myth in the context of film in *Atrocity*. In the fragment entitled 'The Great American Nude', Ballard writes: '[Dr Nathan] looked down at the huge geometric structure that occupied the central lot of the studio, serving as the labyrinth in an elegant film version of *The Minotaur*. [...] He steadied himself on the wooden rail as the helicopter appeared above the pines and sped towards them. So the Daedalus in this neural drama had at last arrived' (87).

²²¹ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library.

1933 to 1939.²²² Yet Demos warns against attempts to draw universal conclusions from Surrealist labyrinths. He explains that ‘while the labyrinth dominated the Surrealist imagination during the 1930s, its meaning or use was no more fixed than was Surrealism’ (Demos 112). In Ballard’s rewriting of the Daedalus and Minotaur myth, it is the former who is trapped in the labyrinth, attempting to decode the structure’s riddles through a knowledge of time. The Minotaur instead roams free and industrious, guiding time to Rozel Point. Therefore, in one sense these two seemingly oppositional mythological figures assist one another: one sailing in with the cargo of time, the other interpreting its meaning. Ballard’s Minotaur is imbued with an objective and seeming humanity (he is ‘obsessed by inexplicable geometries’), which empower the half-man half-beast to commission Daedalus to create the *Spiral Jetty*. The shame of the Minotaur’s unholy conception is rewritten by Ballard. The monster instead resembles Powers, seeking to unlock the mysteries of the environment through the building of a pseudo-labyrinth – a landing point for the unloading of time.

Additionally, Ballard categorises the earthwork artist’s 1973 *Amarillo Ramp*, Tecovas Lake, Amarillo, Texas, as ‘both jetty and runway, a proto-labyrinth that Smithson hoped would launch him from the cramping limits of time and space into a richer and more complex realm’ (‘Cargo Cultist’). For Ballard, labyrinths have the potential of acting as spaces of connection and liberation, allowing the labyrinth walker to free his or her self from the boundaries of earthly restriction. Yet, as will be discussed later in this chapter, in Ballard’s early unpublished short story draft set in Vermillion Sands (c. 1958), while still obsessed with time, the labyrinth is a place of sinister possibilities and deception. This is a similar portrait of labyrinthine spaces as in texts such as ‘The Concentration City’. In a subsequent letter, dated 4 December 2007, there is a partial discussion about the potential of Dean using ‘The Voices of Time’ as the theme for one of her future films. While Ballard states that ‘I think a Tacita Dean film about Spiral Jetty will be fabulous’, he goes on to explain that his agent is attempting to sell the idea of adapting and producing a series of Ballard short stories for

²²² Roger Luckhurst extensively explores in *‘The Angle Between Two Walls’: The Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (1997) how the author hybridises science fiction, Pop Art and Surrealism.

television. This fact prohibits Dean from using ‘The Voices of Time’ for her proposed project. Ballard concludes that Dean does not ‘need’ ‘The Voices of Time’ as an inspirational point of departure, ‘as your films make clear, your imagination is crammed with strange notions about time + space –’.²²³ Illustrating his appreciation for her work, Ballard had mentioned in his earlier letter his admiration for Dean’s own filmic engagements with time and space. In his letter of 22 October 2007 Ballard connects the themes of Dean’s films to Smithson’s earthworks, writing: ‘I see all this linking in with your Crowhurst film (and all that lost circling around in the Atlantic and trying to falsify time and space) and your masterpiece, the revolving TV tower restaurant, another labyrinth people enter at their peril’.²²⁴ In Ballard’s 2001 essay ‘Time and Tacita Dean’ he states his belief that all of Dean’s films are ‘obsessed with time’ (‘Time and Tacita Dean’ 33). He recounts how Dean sent him a copy of the Utah Arts Council instructions for finding *Spiral Jetty*. Dean unsuccessfully attempted to follow these directions in 1997 and determined that the information was so excessively complex ‘that they seem designed to mislead’ (‘Time and Tacita Dean’ 33). Dean concluded that Smithson himself might have written the document. To this idea the author adds, with trademark Ballardian flourish, ‘[o]ne could guess that Smithson, who was soon to die in a plane crash, was posthumously protecting his unique memorial’ (‘Time and Tacita Dean’ 33). In the complete correspondence that Ballard was referencing, Dean also thanks the author for ‘advice about German bunkers’ and explains that she is ‘interested in time-structures, buildings that have lost their function’.²²⁵ Ballard ends his concise essay by writing that Dean has informed him that, due to the retreating Great Salt Lake, the ‘labyrinth of the spiral jetty’ is visible once more, and that he is ‘confident that Tacita will be on hand with her camera when the cargo is at last unloaded’ (‘Time and Tacita Dean’ 33).²²⁶

²²³ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library.

²²⁴ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library. In this passage, Ballard is referencing Dean’s film *Fernsehturm* (2001). The film is a forty-four minute single shot of the interior of Berlin Fernsehturm’s revolving restaurant. Over the course of the film the sky transitions from day to night.

²²⁵ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library.

²²⁶ Unlike in ‘Robert Smithson as Cargo Cultist’ and the 22 October 2007 letter to Dean, Ballard identifies the *Spiral Jetty*’s anticipated cargo as a ‘time-machine’ instead of a ‘clock’ (‘Time and Tacita Dean’ 33).

Ballard and Smithson never met or were in direct communication. After the earthwork artist's sudden death in 1973, a graduate student compiled a catalogue of Smithson's books, magazines and records.²²⁷ Amongst the books in Smithson's possession were Ballard's *The Drought* (1965), *The Terminal Beach* (1964), and *The Voices of Time, and Other Stories*.²²⁸ *The Crystal World* actually served as the titular inspiration for Smithson's essay entitled 'The Crystal Land' (1966) (Alberro 245–46). Additionally, in Smithson's essay 'The Artist as Site-Seer: or, a Dintorphic Essay' (1966–67) the sculptor uses a passage from *The Terminal Beach* as an epigraph: 'The system of megaliths now provided a complete substitute for those functions of his mind which gave to it its sense of the sustained rational order of time and space' ('Artist as Site-Seer' 340). Within the essay itself Smithson employs Ballard in conjunction with other writers and theorists, including Borges, as a means of illustrating what Smithson terms 'environmental coding' (R. Smithson 'Artist as Site-Seer' 340). Smithson writes:

Once we are free from utilitarian presuppositions we become aware of what J. G. Ballard calls "*The Synthetic Landscape*," or what Roland Barthes refers to as "the *simulacrum* of objects," or what Tony Smith calls the "artificial landscape," or what Jorge Luis Borges calls "visible unrealities".²²⁹ (R. Smithson 'Artist as Site-Seer' 340)

Seemingly responding to an imagined query, Smithson reflexively declares: 'What do these four persons have in common? Not assumptions or beliefs of any kind, but the same degree of aesthetic awareness' ('Artist as Site-Seer' 340). Ballard and his dissimilar ideological compatriots recognise, according to Smithson, that the environment is 'coded into exact units of order as well as being prior to all rational theory' ('Artist as Site-Seer' 340). Smithson identifies Stonehenge – not a 'primitive' location, but a 'complex astronomical observatory' – as an example of 'environmental coding'. To support this observation Smithson references the 'megaliths' in Ballard's short story 'The Waiting Grounds' (1959). For Smithson, the mysterious monumental stone rectangles in 'The Waiting Grounds', with their 'finely

²²⁷ Thanks to land artist Nancy Holt for confirming biographical details about her late husband. I am also similarly grateful to Smithson confidant and art dealer Tony Shafrazi, for his anecdotal insights, particularly regarding Smithson's last work, *Amarillo Ramp* (1973), Texas. After Smithson's tragic death, Shafrazi claims that this final earthwork was ultimately completed by himself and the sculptor Richard Serra.

²²⁸ Incidentally, Smithson also owned a copy of Barthelme's *City Life* (1970).

²²⁹ Emphasis is the author's.

chiselled hieroglyphs' and 'carved symbols', represent an intersection of language, structure and time (*Complete Vol. 1* 113). Smithson writes: 'The "noise of history" is contained by Ballard's megaliths. The abyss of language erases the supposed meanings of general history and leaves an awesome "babel"'. These megalithic rectangles are Ballard's memory traces of that elusive prime object—the Tower of Babel' ('Artist as Site-Seer' 341).²³⁰ Gasiorrek notes how the liminal experience of the narrator in 'The Waiting Grounds', who stands at '*the threshold of time and space*', mirrors Powers's cosmic transition in 'The Voices of Time' (*Complete Vol. 1* 125; Gasiorrek 48).²³¹

Smithson's essay 'The Spiral Jetty' (1972) focuses on the sculpture's inspiration and construction, as well as on the resulting film project that Smithson created with assistance. Within his essay, Smithson writes about the significance of the salt crystals that form on the jetty: 'each cubic salt crystal echoes the Spiral Jetty in terms of the crystal's molecular lattice' ('Spiral Jetty' 147). Over time, the crystal deposits grow 'around a dislocation point, in the manner of a screw. The Spiral Jetty [sic] could be considered one layer within the spiralling crystal lattice, magnified trillions of times' (R. Smithson 'Spiral Jetty' 147). Effectively, the *Spiral Jetty* is a series of spirals within a spiral. Ballard would presumably read this as a mechanism of deep coiling history. Preserved by an ever-expanding, hardened sedimentary shell, layer upon layer of salt residue builds new narrative connections between past, present and future time. Evoking a passage from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), a mysterious 'four dimension'- seeing, plunger-shaped alien, a Tralfamadorian, spatialises and visualises time, when the creature declares to 'Earthling' Billy Pilgrim:

I am a Tralfamadorian, seeing all time as you might see a stretch of the Rocky Mountains. All time is all time. It does not change. It does not lend itself to warnings or explanations. It simply *is*. Take it moment by moment and you will find that we are all, as I've said before, bugs in amber.²³² (62)

Temporally and geographically isolated from the cycles and rhythms of inhabited spaces, the 'stretch[ed]' location of the *Spiral Jetty* and its Great Salt Lake cradle are places of

²³⁰ Of course, the Tower of Babel is itself a labyrinth of linguistic obfuscation, a location of intentional scrambling and confusion.

²³¹ Emphasis is the author's.

²³² Emphasis is the author's.

crystallised suspension that time forgot. In both the Tralfamadorian and *Spiral Jetty* vision, time is preserved and expansive, yet for Smithson human intervention can disrupt the arrow of time. Additionally, contrary to the Tralfamadorian's assessment, Smithson believes that the human eye *can* access and objectify time, unlocking terrestrial secrets and cosmic riddles. Ballard mentions having read 'Smithson's vivid writings' and explains that he is convinced that the artist was consciously engaging with the stopping of time in his works. Envisioning Smithson standing on the *Spiral Jetty* – one of the sculptor's 'psychological edifices' – Ballard describes how '[Smithson] resembles Daedalus inspecting the ground plan of the labyrinth, working out the freight capacity of his cargo terminal, to be measured in units of a neurological deep time. He seems unsure whether the cargo has been delivered' ('Cargo Cultist').

Smithson's own essay on the *Spiral Jetty* in part focuses on his 1970 thirty-five minute, 16-mm film by the same name, which was directed and narrated by the artist. Over metronome-like ticking, from some unidentified source, Smithson speaks of how the history of the earth is like a story recorded in a book, 'each page of which is torn into small pieces; many of the pages and some pieces of each page are missing' (*Spiral Jetty Film*). Smithson explores the mythology of the Great Salt Lake, recounting a purported theory, not dispelled until the nineteenth century, about a dangerous craft-threatening whirlpool at the site. Declaring nothing more elucidative than '[t]he lost world', the film hovers on a relatively static shot of vertically stacked book spines. The filmed books include 'prehistoric' science fiction novels, *The Lost World* (1912) by Arthur Conan Doyle and *The Day of the Dinosaur* (1968) by L. Sprague de Camp and Catherine Crook de Camp, a classic work of astronomy, Edwin Hubble's *The Realm of Nebulae* (1936), a book entitled *Sedimentation*, and, most notably, W. H. Matthews's *Mazes and Labyrinths*. By association, this collection of titles contributes to the suggestion that mazes and labyrinths are artefacts of prehistory. It also suggests that the structures are rooted in an undocumented past, potentially as timeless as the universe, and perhaps even as naturally occurring and organic as sedimentation. The film is disorienting: discordant music abounds and without explanation the viewer is rapidly ushered

through interior shots of inanimate objects – maps and dinosaur bones – and exterior images that include the reoccurring motif of footage filmed from a fast-moving vehicle charging down a dusty road. A lengthy sequence in the middle of the film is dedicated to the construction of the *Spiral Jetty*: the relative peace of the location's undulating waters is juxtaposed with the loud, human-born brutality of a bulldozer, aggressively clamping, dragging and lifting rock for the artwork's creation. In one such scene Smithson abruptly proclaims: 'Ripping the *Spiral Jetty*' (*Spiral Jetty Film*). From behind the camera, in the *Spiral Jetty* film Smithson circles the giant spiral by helicopter, emphasising its curvature, and allowing the monumental scale of the sculpture to take centre stage. In the film, Smithson recites, in a flat monotone voice-over, seemingly unrelated prose about the cosmos; at times the camera increases its focus on the centre of the structure, hypnotically drilling down into the earthwork's pre-historic core. Smithson's narration appropriately begins with, '[g]azing intently at the gigantic sun we at last deciphered the riddle of its unfamiliar aspect' (*Spiral Jetty Film*). In the film's aerial sequence, often the bright Utah sun obscures the viewer's vision and the helicopter, heard rhythmically beating in the background, flies over the *Spiral Jetty* with dizzying speed. In 'The Spiral Jetty' essay Smithson points to the appropriateness of his selected filmic process as an expressive vehicle for his artwork: 'a film is a spiral made up of frames [...], helicopter [is] from the Greek *helix*, *helikos* meaning spiral' ('Spiral Jetty' 148).²³³ Further reflecting on the medium of film, Dean insightfully notes, 'Film is time made manifest: time as physical length – 24 frames per second, 16 frames in a 35-mm foot. [...] The time in my films is the time of the film itself' (*Film*). Smithson and Dean both transmit the nuances of time through their films' recorded content and the suitability of the visual medium.

Ballard's reading of Smithson as Daedalus, 'the architect hero' for the *Spiral Jetty*, is in conflict with some art historians' interpretation of the Utah land sculpture. Charting shifting definitions of what is termed 'sculpture', Rosalind Krauss's formalist readings in 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979) finds that at the end of the 1960s sculpture began to

²³³ Italics are the author's own.

explore the outer boundaries of the ‘*not-landscape*’ and ‘*not-architecture*’ binary that defined early 1960s sculpture (36).²³⁴ For Krauss, early 1960s sculpture was identified by what it is not a part of – a result of what the art historian classifies as an exhausted modernist ‘negativity’ (36). Krauss explains that beginning in the early twentieth century modernist sculpture sought a ‘kind of idealist space to explore, a domain cut off from the project of temporal and spatial representation’, but by the 1950s this ‘profitably mined [...] vein’ began collapsing (34). For her, postmodernism ‘expanded [the] field’ of sculpture, allowing an exploration of the new possibilities of ‘*landscape* and *not-landscape*’ and ‘*architecture* plus *not-architecture*’ (41).²³⁵ Krauss concludes that the *Spiral Jetty* plays with the ‘combinations of *landscape* and *not-landscape*’ by physically manipulating and ‘marking a site’ (41). Conversely, sculptures by Richard Serra, for example, embody works that explore ‘*architecture* plus *not-architecture*’, ‘mapping the axiomatic features of the architectural experience—the abstract conditions of openness and closure—onto the reality of a given space’ (41). Krauss did not imagine the *Spiral Jetty* as an architectural intervention. She did not perceive the contours of Smithson’s spiral as outer ‘walls’, nor did she recognise what Ballard identifies as the *Spiral Jetty*’s status as a ‘proto-labyrinth’. Smithson complained that architects ‘tend to be idealists, and not dialecticians’ attuned to the impossibility of ““final solution[s]”” (‘Entropy Made Visible’ 304). Ballard’s interpretation of the *Spiral Jetty* situates Smithson himself as the architect, ushering in a new understanding of time and space. Smithson declared that instead of architects’ ‘grand masterplan schemes for the world’, ‘I propose a dialectics of entropic change’ (‘Entropy Made Visible’ 304). For Krauss, the *Spiral Jetty* is simultaneously a part of the surrounding environment and a fabricated intrusion. By employing a strictly formalist perspective, the land sculpture’s architectural narrative is not apparent to Krauss. Interestingly, she declares that ‘[l]abyrinths and mazes are *both* landscape and architecture’ (38). Yet critically, to Krauss neither object is a ‘variant form of sculpture’ (38).

²³⁴ Emphasis is the author’s.

²³⁵ Emphasis is the author’s.

The Labyrinth and Detective Fiction

Classifying *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* as ‘unsolvable’, ‘mock-detective fictions’, which ask ‘why’ instead of ‘who’, Jeannette Baxter observes that the labyrinthine subject and form of the novels are ‘literary riddles which demand a process of readerly investigation that is alive to the revealing powers of paradox, ambiguity and disorientation’ (‘Visions of Europe’ 97). To readers of postmodernist texts, these narrative strategies are recognisable as archetypal anti-detective fiction, defined not by the investigation of a crime (resulting in reasonable and logical culpability), but “‘negative hermeneutics’” (in which the quest for knowledge is doomed to failure)’ (Marcus 246). Referring to *Cocaine Nights*, Jake Huntley in ‘The Madness of Crowds: Ballard’s Experimental Communities’ (2012) notes that ‘Ballard’s attitude to the conventions of the detective genre is at least the equal of his disregard for standard SF fare’ (219). In ‘Detection and Literary Fiction’ (2003) Laura Marcus traces how detective fiction has been used by a number of critics as a means of creating demarcations between modernist and postmodernist literature. As Roger Luckhurst points out in *The Angle Between Two Walls’: The Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (1997), Brian McHale argues in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) that science fiction (a popular so-called ‘low art’ genre like detective fiction) participates in the formulation of a definition of postmodernism by indicating a philosophical ‘shift’ (Luckhurst *Angle* 11). McHale asserts:

Science Fiction [...] is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism: it is the ontological genre *par excellence* (as the detective story is the epistemological genre *par excellence*), and also serves as a source of materials and models for postmodernist writers.²³⁶ (*Fiction* 16)

While Marcus illustrates the problematics of ‘divisions and correlations’ based on ‘unstable’ categories (‘modernism’, ‘postmodernism’), in regards to labyrinths some interesting observations emerge when examined through the prism of detective fiction (246). Bataille’s ‘negative’/‘nowhere’ labyrinth is a different vision than perhaps the most oft-cited reference to labyrinths in literature since Greek mythology – Borges’s *Labyrinths*. As James E. Irby

²³⁶ Emphasis is the author’s.

notes in his introduction to a collection of short writings, Borges's labyrinths are endless universes of self-contained riddles, which provide both the metaphysical mystery *and* the key to unlocking its secrets. Writing about one of Borges's best-known short stories, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940), Irby quotes the Argentinean author as observing, 'Tlön is surely a labyrinth, but it is a labyrinth devised by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men' (17). Yet while Borges encourages decipherment and a seeming conclusion (the ultimate murder of a foe after extensive deliberation in 'Emma Zunz' (1948), the discovery that the deliberative dreamer is himself the product of another's dream in 'The Circular Ruins' (1940)), the author characteristically refuses to allow the reader the triumph of a definitive ending. There are no narrative ellipses in *Labyrinths*'s 'fictions': the concise texts terminate with an apparent resolution, typically enabled by a revealing plot twist. For example, in what is regarded as Borges's second detective story 'Death and the Compass' (1942), a work highly influenced by Poe, an 'erroneous hunch' allows a bitter adversary the opportunity to enact revenge against a famous detective, Lönnrot (Black 84). John T. Irwin observes that unlike Poe's investigators that solve the mystery, thus outsmarting the culprit, 'Borges's detectives or pursuers are outwitted by the people they pursue, [and] are trapped in a labyrinth fashioned by the pursuer's ability to follow a trail until he arrives in the chosen spot at the expected moment' (49–50). In 'Death and the Compass', what the detective, and thus the reader, thought to be the disentangling of a murder mystery was in fact a series of misinterpreted events and intentional deceptions. In the final pages of the story the hunter is revealed to be the prey. Yet despite this apparent narrative resolution, Borges's works generate an afterglow of puzzlement and intrigue, demanding the reader to extrapolate on the author's broader metaphysical probings. In the final passages of 'Death and the Compass' the detective Lönnrot confronts his would-be assassin, named Scharlach, about the elaborate set-up:

"In your labyrinth there are three lines too many," [Lönnrot] said at last. "I know of one Greek labyrinth which is a single straight line. Along that line so many philosophers have lost themselves that a mere detective might well do so, too."

[...]

“The next time I kill you,” replied Scharlach, “I promise you that labyrinth, consisting of a single line which is invisible and unceasing.”

He moved back a few steps. Then, very carefully, he fired. (*Labyrinths* 117)

Underpinning the drama of revelation in ‘Death and the Compass’ is not only an account of the true series of events but the realisation of a multitude of varying labyrinthine forms: the double narrative of the story is a labyrinth, ‘a single straight line’ is a labyrinth, the fatal path of the bullet is a labyrinth, death itself is a labyrinth (*Labyrinths* 117). The work of detection continues to unravel beyond the confines of the written text. Borges’s stories are less concerned with the reasonable closing of a mystery, a preoccupation one would expect from ‘classical’ detective fiction, than of the journey of metaphysical questioning that the reader undertakes through the unfolding of the dense prose. Narrative byways, gratuitous erudition and factual misdirection are archetypal of Borges’s work, and contribute to the labyrinthine form of his stories – a seemingly ‘infinite’ ‘Library’ of ‘inexhaustible stairways’, multiple centres, a ‘labyrinth of letters’, to invoke ‘The Library of Babel’ (1941) (*Labyrinths* 78–80). Delivering the layered meanings of labyrinths through slow narrative accretion, Borges presents the labyrinth as a flexible and dynamic concept, with both positive and negative implications. Throughout *Labyrinths* Borges continually bends and reshapes the idea of the labyrinth, reinventing the concept to represent both the endless positive intellectual potential of an ‘infinite’ library-universe, as seen in ‘The Library of Babel’, or the negative labyrinthine psychological vertigo portrayed in ‘Emma Zunz’. Acknowledging the diverse significance of labyrinths in his own work, in an interview Borges specifically referred to ‘Emma Zunz’, a tale about truth and lies that captures the destabilising mind-racing delirium of familial revenge, as ‘a story of a living labyrinth’ (Burgin 41).

In one of Ballard’s detective stories, the unpublished draft set in Vermilion Sands, the labyrinth is also a physical and psychic place of sinister possibilities and deception. While across the Vermilion Sands stories the repetitive motif of the labyrinth or the maze can be identified, the unpublished work of short fiction encapsulates Ballard’s career-spanning interest in intersections of labyrinths, time and investigation. It is open to question whether

Ballard would have been familiar with Borges's detective writings when drafting the unpublished short story (c. 1958), which now resides in the J. G. Ballard archive at the British Library. Until the 1950s the Argentinean author was not widely known outside of his native country, even in the Spanish-speaking world. In fact, the date of the unpublished draft is itself an approximation. British Library curator Chris Beckett arrived at the 'c. 1958' date for the unpublished Vermilion Sands story through his own investigative work. When cataloguing the typescript, Beckett assumed that the work did not predate Ballard's first 'professional' published short story 'Prima Belladonna' (1956), which is also set in the remote desert resort. Beckett points to a reference to an 'old Thunderbird' in the story itself, a car introduced by Ford in 1955, and extrapolated that for the vehicle to be considered 'old' at least a few years would have had to elapse, although he admits the text could be from the early 1960s (Beckett 'Re: J.G. Ballard'). After finding its seventeen numbered pages in the bottom of multiple drawers, Beckett claims that the preservation of the unpublished Vermilion Sands draft appears to 'have been accidental' ('Progress' 11). As part of the Acceptance in Lieu scheme, a programme that allows families to settle death duties by transferring important works of art or heritage into public ownership, the British Library acquired Ballard's papers in 2010. This was in spite of Ballard's declamations in numerous interviews that '[t]here are no Ballard archives. I never keep letters, reviews, or research materials. Every page is a fresh page' (Obrist et al. 68). The typed Vermilion Sands short story draft is heavily marked by hand with red and blue ballpoint ink, with entire sections crossed out, words amended and paragraphs abridged. The draft was never given a title by Ballard.

Vermilion Sands as a location is a place of glamour and intrigue, 'an atemporal holiday zone' that champions indulgence, decadence and 'inactivity' (Gasiorek 27). The desert locale is most obviously inspired by the 'resort mentality' on display during Ballard's childhood internment in a Japanese prison camp. In *Miracles of Life* (2008) the author describes his two-year stay at the Lunghua camp as a 'relaxed and casual' affair, 'a ramshackle rather pleasant holiday' where stuffy, decorum-conscious adults shed their formal attire and wore beachwear (*Miracles* 65–66). Gasiorek remarks how even in the Vermilion

Sands stories, which depict the twilight days of the resort town, the location's 'love affair with a fabulous hedonism is blazoned forth by its exotic architecture' (27). Architecture often has a prominent role in the Vermilion Sands stories, most notably seen in the mercurial psychotropic (PT) houses of 'The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista' (1962). 99 Stellavista, a house shaped like an 'enormous orchid', bares the psychological scars of its murderous previous owner, and the structure 'flex[es] and quiver[es]' with every fluctuation of mood (*Vermilion Sands* 191, 198). The narrator comforts his wife who is disturbed by the house's abrupt shape-shifting and the 'possibility of some explosive burst of passion or temperament' by telling her, 'Darling, Vermilion Sands is Vermilion Sands. Don't expect to find suburban norms. People here were individualists' (*Vermilion Sands* 192–93). The TP house is both a physical and psychological labyrinth/maze, a defensive space, 'like a wounded animal', protecting itself and attacking interlopers by altering the layout and contours of its rooms and staircases with unpredictable 'violent spasm[s]' (*Vermilion Sands* 200, 205).

While the organisation of the unpublished Vermilion Sands short story is inchoate, the narrative and plot are well developed. The narrative is framed by the first-person narrator, Max Cladwell, recollecting events from '[I]ast year'. Ballard employs a conventional trope of detective fiction by introducing the mysterious figure of Samuel Hardoon by an unexpected telephone call ('Unpublished Draft' 1). Confronted with a setting of unusual possibilities and potential danger and deception, the reader is told it is off-season in Vermilion Sands, a statement that summons quintessentially cryptic Ballardian imagery: empty pools, barren resorts, transitory figures, dusty discarded games, rows of vacant identical houses, etcetera. Using conventions of traditional detective fiction, the frame narrative of the unpublished draft opens with the narrator, Max, foreshadowing the menacing tale that he is to retell: 'Last year [...] during the summer, I was private secretary to a madman' ('Unpublished Draft' 1). Before accepting the position with Hardoon, Max is issued a warning about his future employer's 'beautiful' daughter, Emerelda Garland: 'Be careful, Caldwell, or she'll swallow you in one

bite’.²³⁷ Returning to the present, Max gravely states to the reader: ‘No prophecy could have been more accurate’ (‘Unpublished Draft’ 1).

The main narrative is about the estate of an eccentric wealthy man, Hardoon, who is building on his sprawling property a ‘Disneyland’ of ‘one-dimensional pastiches that might have been copied directly from an encyclopaedia of architecture’ (‘Unpublished Draft’ 2). The narrator recounts at length the chaotic *mélange* of architectural shapes and styles superimposed on the landscape: life-size replicas of ‘St Mark’s Place in Venice’, ‘Copacabana beach hotels’, ‘a 19th century chinese [sic] temple’, ‘a pseudo Frank Lloyd Wright abstract chapel’ (‘Unpublished Draft’ 2).²³⁸ Max describes this jumbled architectural miscellany as a ‘pocket-city’ of life-size proportions (‘Unpublished Draft’ 2). Presumably, this culling of architectural styles was inspired by Hearst Castle (1920–47), the expansive California ranch that belonged to media giant William Randolph Hearst. Designed as a collaborative project with the architect Julia Morgan, Hearst Castle was an ambitious pastiche of European architectural period styles, which included southern Spanish Renaissance, French Renaissance and ancient Roman. While Hearst originally intended the property to be designed in a ‘Jappo-Swisso bungalow’ style, the built estate features a Roman pool complete with a transplanted ancient temple façade, ornate 160-foot bell towers, ‘cloistered bedrooms’ and sixteenth-century ceilings and archways (Wilson 106–21). Ballard in fact mentioned the Hearst Castle in a 1999 handwritten letter to Iain Sinclair. Congratulating Sinclair on his recent books *Liquid City* and *Rodinsky’s A to Z of London*, Ballard describes the evolving ‘Great Sinclair Project’ as a:

vast Borgesian scheme, paving a dense narrative of words over time worn cobbles + tired pointing of an older London, (though the new C21 London is breaking through) – it reminds me of those Tuscan palazzos that Hearst [word illegible] shipped to the States a century ago, every

²³⁷ Emerelda Garland, or at least her namesake, appears in a later *Vermilion Sands* short story, ‘The Screen Game’ (1963).

²³⁸ References to the last two buildings were crossed out by Ballard. However, this should not be interpreted as an absolute disavowal of the content. I have elected to quote liberally from passages crossed out by the author. This is not only due to the fact that the additional text makes for a much richer document, but also because of what I interpret as part of Ballard’s editorial process: In the draft Ballard often scored a section, only to add a note to disregard the omission, thus suggesting that his process of writing was fluid. Passages that were crosshatched to the point of being nearly unintelligible have not been reproduced; I feel Ballard made his judgment about that rejected prose self-evident.

ancient brick carefully unmoored – in your case every cobble and Victorian street sign is lovingly replaced by a telling metaphor or vivid simile.²³⁹

The cause of Hardoon's frenetic demands for more buildings, more architectural elements, is ostensibly revealed to be related to the 'time sense we all possess', an inherent sensitivity to time that he describes as 'one of our senses, one of our cognitive tools' ('Unpublished Draft' 5). In a series of meandering vocalised thoughts, Hardoon gestures towards the cause of his architectural ambitions. He tells the story's protagonist:

"[T]he sixth sense is that of time, without an ability to measure it life becomes impossible, and obviously the ability to measure its progress is as real as our ability to measure distance, intensities of light and sound and so on. Well, for some years now I've been carrying out a series of experiments – or rather, I have been collating the results of experiments carried out by others – designed to measure this time sense we all possess, the extent to which it can be trained, modified, obliterated altogether and so on. For example, can two parallel time streams coexist in our minds simultaneously? A fascinating question, dont [sic] you agree".

"Absolutely," I agreed, still rather puzzled. "Do you mean to say that your city is a sort of experimental model?" I laughed when he in turn looked surprised. "I thought it was just an elaborate private game of yours". ('Unpublished Draft' 5)

The reader is later informed that Hardoon's architect, Hugo, is constructing an additional structure 'based on the Minoan "labryia" – the insoluble maze, an unbreakable neuro-architectonic structure', that is said to have been used as 'the principle in laboratories to induce nervous exhaustion in rats' ('Unpublished Draft' 2). The design of the 'deliberately insoluble' labyrinth is 'that of the giant bull-maze at Knossos in Crete' and 'a number of optical devices are built into it which give the subject the impression that he is able to escape' ('Unpublished Draft' 6-7). Presumably, 'the Minoan "labryia"' is a reference to *labrys*, an ancient Cretan symmetrical double-headed axe. Etymologically, *labrys* is typically believed to be associated with the Greek word for labyrinths, *labyrinthos*.²⁴⁰ Hugo explains to Max that Hardoon did not request this structure, but that the architect elected to build the edifice because he could think of no better way to 'symbolise the old boy's obsession' ('Unpublished Draft' 6-7). Providing a blueprint for the mandala in 'The Voices of Time', Hugo's labyrinth is described as having a similar plan:

²³⁹ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library.

²⁴⁰ Although many scholars, like Mathews, appear to have accepted this theory, Kern has reservations about this particular etymological connection. See pages 42–43 of *Through the Labyrinth*.

a labyrinth of interlocking corridors and ramps. The winding concrete corridors were open to the sky, the flat walls twelve feet high. In the centre of the maze was an open-area some twenty or thirty yards in diameter, the angled slab of what appeared to be an abstract stage jutting into the air. (Ballard 'Unpublished Draft' 8)

A notable commonality between this labyrinth and the mandala is the 'stage' aspect of the design, underscoring the idea of the labyrinth as an event space, a performative space of expectation. The connection between a miniature city and time is not made explicit until Max is told by Hardoon's sister that a fortune-teller prophesied that should Hardoon ever cease to construct buildings he would die ('Unpublished Draft' 7). Fearing his mortality, for years Hardoon has compulsively commissioned new building projects. Through the construction of physical edifices, Hardoon seeks to appease the demands of time, while scrupulously conducting experiments into ways of circumventing time by scientific trickery. Yet Hardoon becomes trapped in the labyrinth and Max assumes that, unable to escape, he attempted to jump from one of the labyrinth's ramps to a surrounding wall and in the process falls to his death. Max finds Hardoon's body with nails worn down to the quick, caked with blood and dust from frantically scratching at the walls trying to obtain freedom. Max's thoughts are interrupted when he notices that Hugo has been watching and attempts to chase the architect. Max is left wondering if Hugo, conspiring with Emerelda, intentionally killed Hardoon, or if the old man had entered the labyrinth himself and panicked. Max then creates an alternative hypothesis, that Hardoon had in fact deliberately 'pushed away the catwalk and jumped down into the maze, challenging himself to find a route out of his own maze, refusing to accept that it was insoluble' ('Unpublished Draft' 16). The story closes as Max concludes, 'Hardoon, the master-builder, man of many enigmas and unsolved sorrows, who for twenty years had unwittingly, day by day, set the stage for his own death and entrance' ('Unpublished Draft' 16–17). Hardoon's 'entrance' to another realm, a euphemism for death, again reflects a comprehension of labyrinths as platforms for departure, earthly transcendence and conversion. Unlike Powers's peaceful disembarkment in 'The Voices of Time', Hardoon's departure is a distinctly bodily one – frenzied, messy and bloody.

In the chapter entitled ‘Dictionary vs. Encyclopaedia’ in his *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984), Borgesian literary labyrinth-maker Umberto Eco presents his own classification of labyrinths. Eco sets forth three categories of labyrinths: 1) the ‘classical’ Cretan ‘linear’ labyrinth, that is without ‘choices to make’, 2) the mannerist maze – a late Renaissance structure that ‘displays choices between alternative paths’ and dead-ends, 3) the ‘unlimited’ ‘net’ (or ‘*meander*’), where ‘every point [connects] with every other point, and, where the connections are not yet designed, they are, however, conceivable and designable’ (80–81).²⁴¹ Eco states that unlike the classical labyrinth that has a Minotaur at its centre, ‘to make the whole thing a little more exciting’, the second variety of labyrinth, the maze type, ‘does not need a Minotaur: it is its own Minotaur: in other words, *the Minotaur is the visitor’s trial-and-error process*’ (Eco 80–81).²⁴² The unpublished draft’s labyrinth also requires no monster-beast at its centre. Hardoon’s physical restriction, coupled with his psychological constraint (paranoia and claustrophobia), provides the Minotaur-like devouring force of the labyrinth. After discovering Hardoon’s body, Max wryly observes: ‘The irony of the Minotaur trapping himself in his own maze’ (‘Unpublished Draft’ 16). To use Ballard’s famous term, the labyrinth is a physical manifestation of ‘inner space’ – the neglected landscape of the culture-saturated psyche.²⁴³ As Scott Bukatman broadly illustrates in *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (1993):

[‘Inner space’] might imply that Ballard is constructing a psychological science fiction, a science fiction centered upon individual subjectivity, but [...] [h]is work is marked instead by its sustained refusal of individual psychology [...]. The cities, jungles, highways, and suburbs of Ballard’s fiction are relentlessly claustrophobic, yet empty; spectacular, but not seductive; relentlessly meaningful, yet resistant to logic. The repetition and objectiveness of these works suspends temporality while it shrinks space. (41)

In fact, the unpublished draft’s labyrinth has no centre, as the reader is repeatedly told the structure is ‘insoluble’. The story’s labyrinth is not unicursal or multicursal, instead it most closely conforms with Eco’s third classification of labyrinths, which he visualises through the

²⁴¹ Emphasis is the author’s.

²⁴² Emphasis is the author’s.

²⁴³ Ballard’s 1962 guest editorial, ‘Which Way to Inner Space?’, for the science fiction magazine *New Worlds*, famously established his ideas on ‘inner space’. However, he continued to redefine this concept over the course of his lifetime.

Deleuzian-Guattarian ‘vegetable metaphor of the rhizome’ (81).²⁴⁴ Quoting Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, for Eco the ‘rhizome structure’ is a series of interconnecting ‘points’ and ‘lines’ like ‘a tangle of bulbs and tubers appearing like “rats squirming one on top of the other”’ (81). After a lengthy list of contradictory rhizome characteristics, Eco demonstrates the shifting nature of the rhizome, a infinite riddle without a solution:

No one can provide a global description of the whole rhizome; not only because the rhizome is multidimensionally complicated, but also because its structure changes through the time; moreover, in a structure in which every node can be connected with every other node, there is also the possibility of contradictory inferences. (81-82)

Like the anti-heroine Oedipa Maas of Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, Hardoon finds that a quixotic quest for information can ultimately deliver you to a ‘nowhere’. After an extensive series of travails, ‘executrix’ Oedipa arrives at a place of self-doubt and reflects on the mystery she has obsessively pursued (Pynchon 5). The plot is ‘too secret or too involved for your non-legal mind’, she reflects, ‘so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. Or you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull’ (Pynchon 118). Both narratives are dead-ends littered with obfuscatory clues – a ‘meander’ of meaningful, meaningless intersecting connections – but no centre, no ultimate enlightenment. While the unpublished draft cannot be strictly classified as an anti-detective work – too many concessions are made to classic detective fiction – it can be read as an early register of Ballard’s emerging postmodern interest in subverting genres.

The seeds of Ballard’s transgression of conventional expectations for literary genres can be detected years earlier in ‘The Violent Noon’ (1951). In ‘Empires of the Mind: Autobiography and Anti-imperialism in the Work of J. G. Ballard’, Paddy argues that ‘The Violent Noon’, a crime story printed as the joint winner of a Cambridge University’s student magazine competition, should be regarded as Ballard’s first publication. The theme of the competition was revenge, and Ballard’s story is set in colonial Malaysia during the period of the Malayan Emergency. The one-page work is driven by narrative economy and writerly ambition. Stripping the halcyon glow from British colonial history, Ballard’s text is a

²⁴⁴ See Deleuze and Guattari’s *Rhizome: Introduction* (1976).

sceptical take on the waning days of English imperial rule. Exposing a flawed and exhausted mother country, one English character in the story bitterly observes:

“Look at India, Burma, Ceylon. Just given away. [...] And we’ve collapsed like a pricked balloon. There used to be a lot of rubbish shouted about Empire. Heroics and drum-pounding. But no one ever really believed that. The Empire is built on purely economic foundations. Without the colonies England ceases to have any actual existence. She’s just another minor geographic location”. (‘The Violent Noon’ 9)

Written in a style that Ballard described as ‘a Hemingwayesque effort’ (*Miracles* 149), the story is about a group of British colonials on an ill-fated car journey that erupts in violence. While passing through the jungle the vehicle is ambushed by Chinese terrorists.²⁴⁵ A blood-drenched shootout ensues and two of the passengers are instantly killed – a father and his young daughter. John Baxter notes how ‘elements’ of the story gesture towards ‘the future Ballard’, by ‘casua[lly] discarding [...] conventional morality’ and linking cars, sex, and violence (49). However, this work of short fiction should not be mistaken for a ‘classical’ detective story: the narrative of the crime is witnessed by the reader and dominates the text; there is no investigative suspense or ‘double narrative’ (Marcus 245). The ‘investigation’ component of ‘The Violent Noon’, which constitutes just under half of the story’s narrative, results not in the discovery of definitive culpability and conclusion, but instead attempts to reveal the endemic racism and hierarchical injustice that underpins imperialism. In a critique of the fading British Empire, five years prior to the Suez crisis, the reader is told that the fate of the accused Chinese is established prior to any credible criminal investigation. The English police inspector responsible for apprehending the suspects, ‘finished his investigation’ upon learning that the faces of the Chinese terrorists had been witnessed by an Englishman (‘The Violent Noon’ 9). The inspector notes that locating the criminals ‘ought to be quite simple’ and that the case does not ‘[present] any real difficulties’ (‘The Violent Noon’ 9). The English authorities in charge of the criminal justice system declare that all Chinese – an ethnicity that ‘all look the same’ – ‘have alibis and a hundred witnesses [...] don’t pay any attention to them’ (‘The Violent Noon’ 9). The thoroughly unsympathetic protagonist, Hargreaves,

²⁴⁵ Seeking Malaya independence, during the Malayan Emergency (1948–60), communist Chinese guerrilla fighters fought against Commonwealth armed forces.

immediately recognises that the identified men are not the guilty parties. However, he is persuaded to participate in the execution of mock justice, due to the cold, palpable desire of the grieving widow, who wishes to swiftly assign blame for the deaths of her husband and child. A tale more concerned with morality than crime, Hargreaves dubs the charade '[t]he justice of vengeance' ('The Violent Noon' 9). Justice is no longer about guilt or responsibility, instead Hargreaves voluntarily enters a labyrinthine space of colonial argot and destabilised meaning, where conventional 'truth' has little jurisdiction. Yet perhaps Hargreaves was already a walker of metaphorical mazes/labyrinths, as a participant in the twisted, overlapping, interdependent structure of imperialism. Ballard's exploitation of the detective genre could be read as telegraphing early postmodernist "'negative hermeneutics'", for the 'quest for knowledge' in 'The Violent Noon' is indeed condemned (Marcus 246). Probing Western conceits of 'civilisation' and its associations with rationalism, through anti-detective means, Ballard demonstrates the limitations of 'problem solving' (Marcus 251; Spanos 20). In this short text, Ballard exhibits an early rejection of what William V. Spanos identifies as

the rational or rather the positivistic structure of consciousness that views spatial and temporal phenomena in the world as "problems" to be "solved"—[which] constitutes a self-deceptive effort to find objects for dread in order to *domesticate*—to at-home—the threatening realm of Nothingness.²⁴⁶ (20)

As Jeannette Baxter has alluded, Ballard revisited, with varying outcomes, the boundaries and expectations of detective fiction over the course of his oeuvre ('Visions of Europe' 97).

Interestingly, even in this compact text, the 'The Violent Noon' contains a passing explicit reference to labyrinths – albeit of the metaphorical, psychological variety. Ballard writes, 'But who could hope to explore the barren reaches in the labyrinth of the Asiatic mind' ('The Violent Noon' 9).

Across Ballard's oeuvre there are epistolary echoes of ideas laid forth in his Smithsonian-related correspondence with Dean. Conflicting with Ballard's assertion in *The Imagination on Trial* – that after his early writings he shifted focus from the theme of time to

²⁴⁶ Emphasis is the author's.

the ‘fictional elements of reality’ – there is a fascination with the dynamism of time that ripples through the author’s literary corpus (Burns and Sugnet 20). As Borges warns in the 1946 ‘prologue’ to his short ‘essay’ ‘A New Refutation of Time’ (1944–46), ‘our language is so saturated and animated by time that it is quite possible there is not one statement in these pages which in some way does not demand or invoke the idea of time’ (*Labyrinths* 253). Like Borges, Ballard seems unable or, more likely, unwilling to escape time. Significantly, in many of Ballard’s texts time intersects with physical structures to build the cosmic aberration of the labyrinth, the spiral, the maze. For Ballard, labyrinths, spirals and mazes are spaces of time, places of disruption that upend the ‘normal’ workings of the space-time continuum, opening up new narrative potentialities. Piercing the thin membrane of time and memory, history and philosophy, inner and outer space, the physical and metaphoric structure of what Ballard perceives as the labyrinth/maze/spiral trifecta enables a literalisation of the amorphous concept of time. Through a narrative of architectonics, Ballard’s unpublished draft set in *Vermilion Sands* is a story that aspires to draw together psychological (metaphoric) and built (structural/literal) labyrinths. Attempting to outwit time and thus mortality through built space, Hardoon fails, succumbing not to the mystical and transformative powers of the labyrinth as cosmic structure, but to the cruel limitations of mortal man, a labyrinth of human deception. The labyrinth of death, a Borgesian manifestation, indeed, is revealed to be, unlike Lönnrot, the ultimate competent detective. Death as the final counter of time is precise, infallible and incapable of misdirection. Echoing Hardoon’s grandiose aspirations to populate, the Argentinean author writes in the epilogue for *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges*:

Through the years, a man peoples a place with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, tools, stars, horses, and people. Shortly before his death he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his own face. (Burgin 159)

CHAPTER FIVE

Concrete Islands: The Visuality of Ballard's 'Rough Poetry'

In 'The Fourfold Symbolism of JG Ballard' David Pringle argues that the author's 'novels and stories are full of "things seen"—landscapes, objects, creatures. [Ballard] is an intensely visual writer who deals with images and "properties"' ('Fourfold' 127). Pringle continues to explain that these 'interconnected' symbolic 'properties' ('empty cities, sand reefs, half-submerged buildings, helicopters, crocodiles, open-air cinema screens', etc.) – which Pringle determines even the moderately versed Ballard reader intuitively recognises as the author's 'own' – are the definition of 'Ballardian' ('Fourfold' 127).²⁴⁷ Ballard's most distinctive 'seen' architectural 'properties' include the modernist 'vertical zoo' of *High-Rise* (1975), the destabilised, eerie suburban danger found in *The Unlimited Dream Company* (1979) and *Kingdom Come* (2006), and the sinister high-tech, luxury gated homes of *Vermilion Sands* (1971) and *Super-Cannes* (2000) (*High-Rise* 134). In all these examples, Ballard exhibits a curiosity about how people engage with their fabricated surroundings. Irruptions of violence, 'deviant' sexual behaviour and ravenous consumerism perforate the chaotic Ballardian landscape. The distorted happenings of life after midnight are Ballard's métier. From Le Corbusier to Oscar Newman,²⁴⁸ twentieth-century architectural idealism broadly believed that architecture could engender meaningful social change. Ballardian architecture is architectural idealism's cynical evil twin, revealing how man-made structures are social instruments: they are experiments of social order and social control gone awry.

²⁴⁷ Despite the misleading title, *Earth Is the Alien Planet: J. G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare*, Pringle does not attempt to connect Ballard's interest in time and space to the modernist fascination with the 'fourth dimension'.

²⁴⁸ Oscar Newman was an American architect and city planner, best-known for his theory and subsequent book, *Defensible Space* (1972), which identified residents' lack of spatial control in low-income housing estates as an underlying cause of crime. Newman's observations about New York housing projects gave birth to a new criminological sub-discipline, now called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Newman's work was indebted to Jane Jacobs's research. See Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention through Urban Design* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) and Daniel Gilling, *Crime Prevention: Theory, Policy, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2002) 49–55.

Ballard claimed that as a child he wished to become a painter but, despite his ‘fairly visual orientation’, he lacked the prerequisite technical ability (*Conversations* 172, 118). Reflected in his short stories and novels, ‘a series of described paintings’, as he referred to them in an interview, is the legacy of his youthful artistic aspirations (*Conversations* 172). During the same interview Ballard expanded on the theme of an interface between visuality and narrative, inviting his audience to read visually by explaining that in the process of creating his fiction, ‘I very much *see* my novels and short stories as I write’ (*Conversations* 172).²⁴⁹ Yet Ballard’s literary interest in ‘things seen’ is not purely conceptual, representative, symbolic or behavioural; in fact an awareness of the shifting cultural capital of visuality informs the very construction of his prose. In his concluding statement for the *Imagination on Trial* (1981) interview Ballard reflects on the importance of publishing his work, not in specific magazines, but within the medium of ‘a magazine’:²⁵⁰

I’ve always been conscious since I started writing that the tide was running the wrong way for the writer, whereas the visual artist, the painter or sculptor, was in a seller’s market; the direction of the twentieth century was ever more visual. I sensed way back in the late fifties when I started that the tide was running away from the written word towards the visual mode of expression and therefore one couldn’t any more rely on the reader, you couldn’t expect him to meet you any more than half way. One’s in the arena on the lion’s terms. (Burns and Sugnet 30)

Ballard’s McLuhan-esque assertion about the growing significance of visuality, as the Western ‘mainstream’ migrates away from a print-bred culture into ‘the enclosed and mediated spaces governed by the rule of images’ (Lapham xv), is reflected in a series of experimental works. From the late 1950s to early ’70s Ballard played with a range of visual strategies and formal techniques: textual and pictorial collage, graphic works (‘advertisements’) and concrete poetics.²⁵¹ Ballard, who enthusiastically proclaimed that he was ‘intensely responsive to’ and ‘always interested in’ the visual arts, originally intended to explore visuality as a dominant mode of late twentieth-century communication by more explicit means in *Atrocity* (*Conversations* 118; ‘From Shanghai’ 120). Highlighting the text’s

²⁴⁹ Emphasis is the author’s.

²⁵⁰ Emphasis is the author’s.

²⁵¹ For an in-depth look at Marshall McLuhan’s theories on the dominance of twentieth-century visuality, please refer to Chapter Two. Note that while McLuhan’s unique taxonomy categorised writing as visual and television as aural-tactile, this chapter conceives of mass media and visuality in the conventional manner.

commitment to image-making and the visual arts, the title *The Atrocity Exhibition* is in reference to an ‘annual exhibition’ of paintings by ‘long-incarcerated’ asylum patients (*Atrocity* 1). The reader is told that these disturbed minds are not permitted to view the exhibition themselves, but that their works of art hang on the walls ‘like codes of insoluble dreams, the keys to a nightmare’ (*Atrocity* 1). The content of *Atrocity* is frequently punctuated by clinical descriptions of sensationalised images (oversized billboards, ‘motion picture studies’ of celebrities, ‘montage sequences of commercial pornographic films’, etc.). Ballard also wished to heighten the visual components of the text by including pictorial elements (*Atrocity* 141, 79).

Ballard initially intended to publish *Atrocity* as a large-format book illustrated with collaged material, composed by the author, which he would source from medical photographs and documents, and – emphasising *Atrocity*’s ancestral relationship with *Crash* (1973) – what he referred to as, ‘crashing cars and all that sort of iconography’ (‘From Shanghai’ 124).²⁵² Due to the expense and the complicated nature of the proposed project, however, it never came to fruition.

Atrocity is a ‘collage of “condensed novels”’; many of the textual fragments that make up the work were published elsewhere prior to being stitched together in a patchwork fashion (Gasiorek 16).²⁵³ Roger Luckhurst argues that ‘[t]he space of *Atrocity*’ can also be read as a Cubist work, due to Ballard’s destabilising technique of ‘superimpos[ing]’ blocks of text upon ‘previous blocks’ (*Angle* 89). In the ‘Author’s Note’ Ballard advises the reader that the best means of accessing *Atrocity*’s ‘underlying narrative’, buried within the structure’s thick,

²⁵² Of course, the content of *Atrocity*’s text also exhibits the thematic antecedents of *Crash*. The chapter ‘Crash!’ is perhaps the most blatant example, and includes references to ‘images of colliding motor cars’, the ‘ritual sacrifice’ of ‘auto-disaster’ and ‘perverse intercourse’, and ‘the crucial image of the machine as conceptualized psychopathology’ (*Atrocity* 154–56). As Ballard explains in his annotations, ‘Crash!’ was written a year prior to his own exhibition of crashed cars at the New Arts Laboratory, London (*Atrocity* 157). Baxter attributes this turning of ‘textual documents [...] into multi-media events’ to the influence of Paolozzi (66).

²⁵³ Across a range of avant-garde magazines Ballard published fifteen separate stories between 1966 and 1969, which were later revised to become *Atrocity*. When published in magazine form, some of the stories had illustrations and photographs; these were later removed. Prompted by an obscenity trial in the England, ‘Why I want to Fuck Ronald Reagan’ (1967), which Luckhurst has dubbed ‘a prose poem’ but is more commonly referred to as a ‘fragment’, the first American edition of *Atrocity* was pulped by Doubleday (*Science Fiction* 145). The American edition was later entitled *Love and Napalm: Export USA* by Grove Press.

seemingly desultory ‘fog’, is by opening the book at random and reading ‘anything that resonates in an intriguing way’ (*Atrocity* vi). *Atrocity* is Ballard’s Surrealist *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse), revealing the unexpected hybridised visual ‘logic’ of what he terms ‘[t]he New Eros’ (*Atrocity* 79). When Ballard writes passages like, ‘the structure resembled her body, an exact formalization of each curve and cleavage’, or ‘*Marilyn Monroe*: [...] the falling temperature of her rectum embodied in the white rectilinear walls of the twentieth-century apartment’,²⁵⁴ and perhaps most explicitly, ‘Webster watched the images of the young woman on the screen, sections of her body intercut with pieces of modern architecture. All these buildings. What did Talbert want to do – sodomize the Festival Hall?’, the author goes beyond conventional anthropomorphism, revealing that built space, a visual and physical manifestation, has the potential of being an emblem of pathological priapism (*Atrocity* 86–87, 115). Like much of the mass media in *Atrocity*, architecture’s power is in part transmitted visually, exhibiting unanticipated vitalising vulgarity while acting as an elaborate onanistic toy.

Ballard located his works within New Wave science fiction and Surrealist contexts, but he observed that beginning with the conception of *Atrocity*, Pop Art influences began recognisably to filter into his texts. Despite the lack of overt references, Ballard was influenced by Pop Art’s countercultural spirit and ‘determination to change’ the artistic status quo, even prior to *Atrocity*’s incremental publication (‘From Shanghai’ 121). While the visual features of Ballard’s infamous libidinally charged *Atrocity*, and his Eduardo Paolozzi-inspired ‘advertisements’,²⁵⁵ have been the subject of sensitive and insightful critical readings, most notably by Luckhurst, Andrzej Gasiorek, and Jeanette Baxter, the way in which Ballard’s visual works form points of contact with architecture have gone unexplored.²⁵⁶ Of related interest is Joanne Murray’s article ‘RE/Search, J. G. Ballard and New Brutalist Aftermath Aesthetics’ (2011), where works from the Independent Group’s exhibitions, *Parallel of Life*

²⁵⁴ Italics are the author’s own.

²⁵⁵ The images from Ballard’s ‘advertisements’ were partially sourced from Paolozzi’s image bank (Baxter 67).

²⁵⁶ See pages 73–117 in ‘*The Angle Between Two Walls*’ by Luckhurst, pages 8–19, 58–80 in *JG Ballard* by Gasiorek, and pages 59–98 in *J. G. Ballard’s Surrealist Imagination* by Baxter.

and Art (1953)²⁵⁷ and *This Is Tomorrow* (1956), are interpreted as visual analogues for *Atrocity*. Murray also contributes to an understanding of Ballard's visual aesthetic in relation to the book, particularly the RE/Search edition of the text (1984), and argues that the drawings by medical illustrator Phoebe Gloeckner approximate Ballard's idea of an illustrated version of the book.²⁵⁸ Linda S. Kauffman adds that through pictorial juxtapositions Gloeckner opens up Ballard's 'fractured view of "reality"' by associating 'penises with pipe hoses, arteries with freeways, sexual reproduction with cell reproduction' (167). Gloeckner's anatomical illustrations of the human body rendered in microscopic detail – intentionally violating and penetrating the skin, to reveal the most basic human functions – serve to enhance the corporal content of the book. Yet, within Murray's essay the architectural component of the Independent Group (IG), an art collective made up of disparate talents that was affiliated with the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, garners only brief mention. Architecture was central to the early incarnation of the Independent Group. From its inception in 1952 to the end of the first session in 1954, the intellectual and artistic focus of the organisation was guided by architectural figures: during this period the architects Alison and Peter Smithson were the de facto 'leaders' of the motley assemblage of artists, and the architectural historian Peter Reyner Banham 'acted as convener' (Garlake 137).²⁵⁹ While Ballard's personal and professional admiration for other figures of the Independent Group, such as Paolozzi and Richard Hamilton, is undoubtedly significant to his development as a writer, examining the group from the perspective of its architectural contributions and ambitions provides a more comprehensive understanding of the organisation's broad artistic

²⁵⁷ *Parallel of Life and Art* was a collaborative exhibition by the Smithsons, Henderson, and Paolozzi, which took place at the ICA gallery.

²⁵⁸ Murray writes that this text's 'radical non-linear narrative structure, one that encourages the reader to engage with the text like a media product or collage, is encouraged not just by RE/Search's inclusion of actual illustrations and photographs, but also through the interplay that is set up between text and image' (154–55). Ballard also published three illustrated stories with graphics, technical drawings and photographs. While these stories have received little critical attention, in her chapter 'Reading *The Atrocity Exhibition*' Baxter explores one of these works of short fiction ('The Summer Cannibals' [1969]). See *J. G. Ballard's Surrealist Imagination* pages 69–74.

²⁵⁹ It should be noted that the Independent Group itself was resistant to the idea of formal organisational hierarchy.

project. For Ballard, the consideration of architectural form and theory can have literary consequences. Ballard's visual works seek to investigate the architectonic possibilities of language and writing. Noteworthy and underappreciated is Ballard's sole published foray into concrete poetics ('Love: A Printout For Claire Churchill' [1968]), and how more generally his visual oeuvre, like his textual collage *Project for a New Novel* (c. 1958) and *Atrocity*, sits within his architectural repertoire. While it is unlikely that Ballard was attuned to the global variants and strains of the concrete poetry movement, his visual works do, however, show aesthetic imprints from both midcentury avant-garde communities (namely the Independent Group) and mid-twentieth-century visual poetics. Turning the text into a visual object – an image – through a spatial display, Ballard's concrete poetics test the potential and limitations of 'the placement of words on the page, their sound, their physical appearance, and their interrelation to one another' (Bohn 119).

Birthplace of Pop

Underscoring the importance of architecture and 'the visual' on his authorial development, Ballard was emphatic about the influence of the 1956 *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, which he frequently referenced in interviews as a national and professional watershed moment. Ballard dedicated a chapter to the exhibition in his autobiography, proclaiming in *Miracles of Life* (2008) that the show 'was the most important event in the visual arts in Britain until the opening of Tate Modern' (*Miracles* 187). Ballard determined that *This Is Tomorrow* was the true 'birth' of Pop Art, dismissing the American-centric branch of the movement (Andy Warhol and the like) as having emerged later ('From Shanghai' 121).²⁶⁰ The exhibition was organised by the architectural critic Theo Crosby and consisted of twelve autonomous 'groups' or 'market-stalls', many of which represented

²⁶⁰ Ballard also recognised in *Miracles of Life* that *This Is Tomorrow* 'leaned a little on Hollywood and American science fiction' (*Miracles* 188). Some Independent Group artists like Nigel Henderson and Toni del Renzio took a more Eurocentric approach to the subject of their works.

‘strands of the [Independent] Group’s thinking’ (Whiteley 113; Robbins *Aesthetics* 135).²⁶¹

Although, as with most aspects of Independent Group history, there are divergent opinions and remembrances concerning the evolution of the exhibition, *This Is Tomorrow* is generally accepted as having been actualised by the Group.²⁶² The Independent Group was an iconoclastic British art collective, officially active in various formulations between 1952 and 1955, operating under the ICA ‘umbrella’. While both organisations shared a common disdain for academicism, and the ICA eventually distanced itself from the ‘purity’ of pre-war European modernism, there is debate about how congenially the two organisations interacted with one another (Garlake 137–38; A. Massey 2). For the Independent Group, European modernism was a departure point which enabled deeper probes into culture, not the zenith of artistic innovation, as the ICA management originally contended (A. Massey 2).

A multidisciplinary organisation that argued for connections between unlikely intellectual partners, for instance an ‘alliance of art and science’, the Independent Group challenged the traditional aesthetic divisions between art and non-art, high culture and low culture (‘market place’ or “‘throw-away” culture’), worthy of analysis and unworthy of analysis (Harrison 97; Robbins ‘Forerunners’ 237). The ‘sociological framework’ that the Independent Group adopted allowed them to focus on how art ‘actively construct[s] meaning’ (Garlake 137). ‘[S]cience, technology, and the history of design’ was the focus of the Group’s early meetings (A. Massey 49). In *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain* (1995), Anne Massey notes that the Group embraced technology wholeheartedly, viewing scientific and technological advancement as related to mass culture through an ‘evolutionary’ lens (50). The Group’s view of the emancipatory ‘promise’ of science and technology was uncritical. David Robbins’s collection, *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (1990), calls the unwavering belief in technology displayed by the Group as ‘neo-futurist faith’ (‘Forerunners’ 237). Massey credits an aspect of

²⁶¹ Five or six of the exhibition’s environments had no or only loose Independent Group affiliation; some of these projects derived from a Constructivist aesthetic, while others had ‘no obvious allegiance’ (Whitham 137, 148–49).

²⁶² The Smithsons, for example, have claimed *This Is Tomorrow* ‘had nothing whatsoever to do with the Independent Group’ (‘The “as Found”’ 201).

this dedication to the fact that many of the Independent Group members had professional contact with science and technology through related industries: as examples, she names Hamilton's experience as an engineering draughtsman and Sam Stevens, James Stirling and Colin St John (Sandy) Wilson's training as architects (50).

Intentionally transgressing the boundaries between different artistic disciplines and mediums, when Crosby devised the twelve exhibition groupings, he attempted for each set, 'notionally at least', to include 'an architect, a painter and a sculptor' (Garlake 140). *This Is Tomorrow* was a highly successful event, attracting nearly a thousand people a day – an impressive feat, particularly considering the exhibition's relatively less accessible location in the East End of London (Whitham 'Exhibitions' 135). The event raised what the art critic and leading member of the Independent Group, Lawrence Alloway, described as the 'iron curtain of traditional aesthetics', flouting the mores of the 'highbrow' by unabashedly putting the Group's commitment to re-imagined 'lowbrow' material culture on public display (Harrison 96). Ballard assessed that the prevailing theme for the disparate *This Is Tomorrow* was each group's 'vision of the future' (*Miracles* 187). In the catalogue for one of Paolozzi's late 1970s solo exhibitions, the *This Is Tomorrow*'s Pop era imaginations of the future are referred to as 'technocratic-automated-cosy' (Schmied 21). Much of *This Is Tomorrow* was visually loud – a sustained assault on the senses – and in an act of exploitative Hollywood science fiction kitsch, the opening of the exhibition was presided over by Robbie the Robot from *Forbidden Planet* (1956) – which was considered a great coup by the group.

Ballard felt that the experience of witnessing *This Is Tomorrow* is what eventually 'convinced [him] that science fiction was far closer to reality than the conventional realist novel of the day' (*Miracles* 189). As Martin Harrison notes in *Transition: The London Art Scene in the Fifties* (2002), the Independent Group's radical mission 'launched a revisionist assault on established art theory' by proposing that 'all images may convey meaning, [and] that analyzing a science-fiction movie could reveal as much about the culture that produced it as does a Renoir painting' (15). For Ballard, *This Is Tomorrow* cemented his belief that 'science fiction had a huge vitality that had bled away from the modernist novel' (*Miracles*

189). Although a genre that continues to climb the ladder of literary legitimacy, science fiction in the 1950s, beyond its mainstream utopian/dystopian exceptions like *Brave New World* (1932) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), was treated as disposable fiction not worthy of the dignity of the canon. In part, for this very reason, members of the Independent Group gravitated to science fiction, predominately that of American origin, for cultural references and artistic inspiration. Beyond the threat it posed to the 'cultural establishment', Group members believed science fiction revealed truths about society not expressed in other mediums. Independent Group sculptor William Turnball felt that science fiction was a rare area that appropriately represented modern technology (Whitham 'Science Fiction' 61).

The Group's adoption of the potent visual imagery of science fiction magazines can most clearly be seen in Paolozzi's 'BUNK' collages.²⁶³ Already regarded by many as 'bunk' – i.e. rubbish, waste – in some of these collages, illustrated front- and back-covers of science fiction magazines (*New Worlds*, *Amazing Stories*, *Science Fiction*, *Science Fantasy*) were dislocated from their accompanying pages of text and transplanted as a single ready-made image into Paolozzi's scrapbook pages and 'BUNK' prints – a series of lithographic reproductions of collages from around the 1940s and '50s. Other Paolozzi collages that utilise science fiction magazines as their source material, juxtapose ripped covers from more than one title (for example, *The Ultimate Planet* [1952] combines a 1949 cover of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* with the spring 1952 cover of *Science Fantasy*). The suggestion of Paolozzi's science fiction 'BUNK' collages was that the images and graphics that make up the covers themselves contain narratives. The brightly coloured, scantily clothed women in various arm-extended poses of distress, the gunmetal-grey, armour-clad aliens exiting their craft, a robot on a destructive rampage surrounded by explosions, are transformed by Paolozzi not into illustrations or advertisements of the stories within the magazine, but into their own autonomous art form. Paolozzi's isolation of the back- and front-covers suggest that these images communicate something deeper and richer than the text they previously bound. In

²⁶³ Paolozzi is credited as having been the first British artist to start working with collaged advertising materials as early as 1947 (Osterwold 64).

particular, when looked at in context of the advertisement-driven collages that are also part of the 'BUNK' collection (for example, the Coca-Cola imagery in *I Was A Rich Man's Plaything* [1947]), these covers reveal less about the fantasy worlds they claim to depict, than about the here and now, the futuristic present – a world of banners, images and surfaces.

One of the science fiction magazines that Paolozzi returned to as source material was the British publication *New Worlds*. This magazine was of particular significance to the development of Ballard's career. Through the publication of short stories, the magazine was part of how Ballard established his passionate fan base. *New Worlds* became an important outlet for the evolution of British New Wave science fiction, featuring the works of Michael Moorcock and Brian Aldiss. Ballard wrote numerous reviews and essays for *New Worlds*; amongst these, the most notable contribution is 'Which Way to Inner Space?' (1962), an article that was published as a guest editorial for the magazine. Moorcock eventually became editor and transformed the magazine into a 'large-format avant-garde publication with considerable emphasis on the visual arts' (Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 61). Ballard himself contributed experimental avant-garde material to *New Worlds*, as well as to *Science Fantasy*. One such work, which was outside conventional understandings of the science fiction genre, was Ballard's collage of textual fragments sourced from professional chemical and engineering industry literature; the work became known as *Project for a New Novel*. Ballard called technical journals, industry fliers, scientific textbooks, corporate brochures, government reports, etc., 'invisible literature' – a seemingly dull literary undercurrent that is not, in fact, specialised, but instead a potent presence, informing narratives and exerting influence while remaining unseen.

Ballard's mass-media collage technique is derived from the Independent Group's commitment to, what the Smithsons termed, an "'as found'" aesthetic ('The "as Found"' 201). Exploring the crude integrity of the overlooked mundane, the Smithsons advocated a new way of 'seeing the ordinary', arguing for 'an openness as to how prosaic "things" could re-energise our inventive activity' ('The "as Found"' 201). Re-evaluating the "'as found'" from the vantage point of the late 1980s, the Smithsons observed that in the 1950s they first began

locating the “‘as found’” in architecture through viewing photographs by Nigel Henderson.²⁶⁴ These images depicted everyday urban outdoor scenes of post-war Bethnal Green: ‘children’s pavement play-graphics; [...] the detritus on bombed sites, [...] heaps of nails, fragments of sack’ (‘The “as Found”’ 201). Echoing Ballard’s ‘first impressions of England’ – the author described the country as ‘derelict, dark and half-ruined’ and marvelled that, despite military victory, English people seemed ‘like a defeated population’ – for the Smithsons, London in the post-war period was a ‘society that had nothing’ (*Miracles* 122–23; ‘The “as Found”’ 201). In response to this, the Smithsons elected to embrace society’s authentic current condition. ‘[A]s found’ architecture sought to reflect this acceptance of things as they are by valuing materials in their unaltered state – ‘the woodness of wood’ – while dismissing the artificiality of excessively manufactured synthetic materials like ‘the new plastics of the period’ (‘The “as Found”’ 201).²⁶⁵ As Harrison notes, ‘[t]he Smithsons became the most influential theorists among British architects in the Fifties, and their ideas were soon dispersed internationally’ (127).

The architectural ancestry of *This Is Tomorrow* can be traced back to Paule Vézelay, the London representative of the Groupe Espace, a French neo-Constructivist association which extolled a philosophy that argued ‘that art was simply part of the larger urban space and therefore was a social and not individualistic activity’ (Robbins *Aesthetics* 135–36).²⁶⁶ Vézelay proposed the ‘initial suggestion’ for an exhibition whose aim was a collaboration of architects, painters and sculptors; from there the idea was referred to Sir Leslie Martin, chief architect to the London County Council (LCC), and eventually to Colin St John (Sandy) Wilson, who also worked for the LCC housing division (Robbins *Aesthetics* 135). Ultimately, Crosby took over the organising of the event and Alloway acted as the promoter. The legacy

²⁶⁴ Henderson’s Bethnal Green photographs were used in the Smithsons’ *CIAM Grille* (1953) presentation for the influential Congrès internationaux d’architecture moderne (CIAM) 9, Aix-en-Provence, France (Garlake 138).

²⁶⁵ It should be noted that the Smithsons rejected the word ‘design’ as a ‘dirty word’ (‘The “as Found”’ 201).

²⁶⁶ However, Massey suggests that in 1950, even prior to Vézelay’s intervention, J. M. Richards, editor of *The Architectural Review* from 1937 to 1971, proposed the idea of an interdisciplinary, collaborative exhibition (98).

of the Constructivist influence persisted even after Vézelay's involvement had come to an end. There was a discernable tension in the exhibition between the Independent Group and Constructivist strands. Graham Whitham quotes the art critic for the *London Times* as noting:

There is no over-all unanimity to the exhibition. [...] On the one hand a number of collaborations have brought sculpture and architecture together in a genuine synthesis. [...] Against these formal coherent and discrete works of art are to be set a number of exhibits whose purpose is the exact opposite. ('Exhibitions' 135)

One such example of an attempt at 'genuine synthesis' is Group Eight's contribution to *This Is Tomorrow*: Richard Matthews, Michael Pine and Stirling created an uneven, tubular honeycomb-like structure that was designed as a topological study of magnified soap bubbles. According to Pine, the 'construction had "tree-like overtones"' (Whitham 'Exhibitions' 143). Relating to this observation, Group Eight's statement for the exhibition catalogue passionately declared an end to the prison house of the 'formalist vacuum' and predicted that

the total plastic expression (architecture, painting, sculpture) will be in the landscape with no fixed composition but made up of people, volumes, components – in the way that trees, all different, all growing, all disrupted into each other, are brought together in an integrated clump. (W. A. Gallery 27)

For the Independent Group, architecture was about more than style or utilitarianism: architecture was viewed as interrelated to other art forms and, critically, a social discourse.

Regardless of any apparent conflict between Independent Group and Constructivist architectural objectives, the overall role of architecture in *This Is Tomorrow* was defining. The significance of architecture to the exhibition was not only on the level of theory and formal engagement, but also through the construction of the exhibition space itself. Margaret Garlake argues in *New Art New World* (1998) that '[d]espite the prominence in memory and literature of [Richard] Hamilton's installation, "This is Tomorrow" remains primarily an architects' project since, as the organisers of the space, they effectively controlled the circulation and the conceptual links between sections' (141).²⁶⁷ Predictably, the space of the exhibition was as eclectic as its content. While each individual group's contribution was

²⁶⁷ Hamilton's installation, part of Group Two, along with McHale and the architect John Voelckner, blended optical illusions (the Bauhaus and Marcel Duchamp), popular film imagery (Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch*), and fine art (Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers*). The Group Two stall is regarded as the most popular contribution to *This Is Tomorrow* (Robbins *Aesthetics* 139).

produced autonomously, the design and layout of the exhibition allowed the visitor to enter through the gallery vestibule, which housed Group One (Crosby, Turnbull, Germano Facetti, and Edward Wright), and move counter clockwise through each environment in roughly numerical order (Robbins *Aesthetics* 134; 137). Yet the environments varied greatly in regard not only to the manner of artistic expression, but also the way in which each group occupied its space. The layout of the exhibition created a bombardment of visual and sensory stimuli, in part caused by corralling visitors through restrictive passageways and overlapping spatial boundaries between each exhibition ‘stall’. This aspect of the design and layout of *This Is Tomorrow* translated the Group’s belief in the democratic spirit of art, positioning each stall beyond its numerical designation, without hierarchy. The visitor navigated the overwhelming space by consuming all the exhibition had to offer. In some instances (as with Robert Adam, Peter Carter, Frank Newby and Wilson’s design, an intended homage to Le Corbusier’s chapel of Notre Dame du Haut [1950–55])²⁶⁸ the visitor was forced to walk *through* the artwork itself, entering thresholds and passageways, within an enclosure that is not easily defined as sculpture or architecture but something in-between (Robbins *Aesthetics* 145). The architect(s) of each group were the primary party responsible for constructing the ‘habitat’ for each exhibition ‘stall’, thereby outlining the parameters of the group’s project.

The Smithsons undertook their contribution to *This Is Tomorrow*,²⁶⁹ ‘Patio and Pavilion’, as an architectural project. An exhibit made in cooperation with Henderson and Paolozzi, the Smithsons (Group Six) explain that ‘Patio and Pavilion answered a “programme” of our own making, offering a definitive statement of another attitude to “collaboration”: the “dressing” of a building, its place, by the “art of inhabitation”’ (‘The “as Found”’ 201). The pavilion was ‘to some extent a parody of Nigel Henderson’s backyard in

²⁶⁸ In 1951, while visiting the famed architect’s office, Wilson had come across Le Corbusier’s chapel as a model and had not realised it was a building (Whitham 145). The Group was conflicted about the legacy of modernist architects, particularly Le Corbusier. On one hand, Banham derided the modernist architects’ claim that their design was ‘wholly utilitarian and objective, without aesthetic bias’ (A. Massey 51). For Banham, modernist architecture was just another architectural style, not an epoch. Yet, on the other hand, Independent Group members, including Banham, contributed extensively to various London-based Le Corbusier events (A. Massey 50–51).

²⁶⁹ The Smithsons were adamant that their participation in *This is Tomorrow* was unrelated to the Independent Group (‘The “as Found”’ 201).

Bethnal Green', and was a 'habitat symbolic of human needs – space, shelter, and privacy – and [...] objects [...] represent[ing] the range of human activity' (Whitham 'Exhibitions'

141). Ballard's apocalyptic recollection of 'Patio and Pavilion' interpreted the environment as

a basic unit of human habitation in what would be left of the world after nuclear war. Their terminal hut, as I thought of it, stood on a patch of sand, on which were laid out the basic implements that modern man would need to survive: a power tool, a bicycle and a pistol. (*Miracles* 187–88)

For Murray, 'double[s]' for Ballard's fiction can be identified in both 'Patio and Pavilion' and *Parallel of Life and Art*, which she asserts, 'converge in their imaginative recreations' of his work (161). Murray argues that the imprint of Ballard's exposure to 'Patio and Pavilion' can be located in his 'terminal documents' (*Atrocity* 1): a seemingly unrelated eerie collection of disaster-ready scientific, artistic and architectural objects, images, and data. Signalling its thematic importance, the first reference to 'terminal documents' in *Atrocity* is on the opening page of the text:

Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown. The noise from the cine-films of induced psychoses rose from the lecture theatre below Travis's office. Keeping his back to the window behind his desk, he assembled the terminal documents he had collected with so much effort during the previous months: (1) Spectro-heliogram of the sun; (2) Front elevation of balcony units, Hilton Hotel, London; (3) Transverse section through a pre-Cambrian trilobite (4) 'Chronograms,' by E. J. Marey; (5) Photograph taken at noon, August 7th, 1945, of the sand-sea, Qattara Depression, Egypt; (6) Reproduction of Max Ernst's 'Garden Airplane Traps'; (7) Fusing sequences for 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Boy', Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-Bombs. When he had finished Travis turned to the window. As usual, the white Pontiac had found a place in the crowded parking lot directly below him. The two occupants watched him through the tinted windshield.²⁷⁰ (*Atrocity* 1)

A departure from what Ballard called the 'basic implements that modern man would need to survive: a power tool, a bicycle and a pistol', Ballard's post-nuclear preparedness kit broadly omits dietary nourishment, mobility, tools, shelter (except impractical drawings of the Hilton Hotel) and accommodations for personal safety (excluding the improbable use of 'A-Bombs') (*Miracles* 188). Instead, Travis's selected disparate materials rely on the protective power of scientific discoveries and technological inventions – all results of human ingenuity and imagination.²⁷¹ The list demonstrates how mankind is capable of creating sublime beauty (a

²⁷⁰ Ballard claimed in interviews that his favourite building in London was the Heathrow Hilton.

²⁷¹ The main character of *Atrocity* is an allusive, shape-shifting figure, with a multiplicity of identities. He is referred to in the text as Traven, Talbot, Tallis, Trabert, Travis, Talbert and Travers. Luckhurst dubs this figure 'T-cell' (*Angle* 86). See 'The Angle Between Two Walls' pages 86 and 186.

spectro-heliogram, Ernst's 'Garden Airplane Traps'), or awe-inspiring destruction (the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing on 7 August, 1945), whimsical codenames for catastrophic kilograms of uranium ('Little Boy' and 'Fat Boy'). In the annotations for '**Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown**', Ballard explains that many of the 'lists' in the text 'were produced by free association' (*Atrocity* 14). Presumably, this use of automatic writing was also a Surrealist exercise for Ballard – allowing the unconscious, perhaps even one's more qualified reptilian brain, to dictate survival essentials.

Murray argues that the 'numerous lists and associative chains found in *The Atrocity Exhibition*' and the Smithsons' contribution to the *Parallel of Life and Art* exhibition catalogue, 'bear an uncanny resemblance' to one another (Murray 160). The Smithsons' pages from the catalogue list items under headings that challenge taxonomy and as a result 'encourage the disruption of [...] formal analogies between disparate phenomena when visualized' (Murray 161). Murray supports her assertion by seizing on the example of the catalogue page on 'ANATOMY', which lists beneath its heading images like: '1. A Watch 2. Two radio valves 3. Under side of TV chassis' (Whitham 'Exhibitions' 124).²⁷² Similar to the numbered stalls in *This Is Tomorrow*, the numerical order of the items on the list contain no sense of ranking or hierarchy; instead many of the lengthier records drone on, one line breathlessly blending into another, creating an exhausting monotony of words and images. If read out loud this process becomes all the more cumbersome and tedious. Adjacent to the listed items is, presumably, the source where the image was "as found", for example:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 32. Funeral of the late King George VI. | Newspaper image. |
| 33. Corps de dame, B. Dubuffet, 1950. | Collection of A. Ossorio. |
| (Whitham 'Exhibitions' 124) | |

Garlake notes that within the catalogue one can witness the Independent Group's rejection of the boundaries of 'conventional categorisation in favour of a more discursive system' (260). She points out how under the catalogue's section on 'ARCHITECTURE', the objects/images listed 'include entries for "UNO Building", "Detail, mask of Quetzalcoatl" and "Different

²⁷² Murray adds that Gloeckner's illustrations for *Atrocity* serve to 'visualize [the] "terminal documents"' (160).

types of vegetable cellular tissue” (260). The Smithsons’ catalogue embodies the Independent Group’s commitment to transgressing disciplinary expectations and conventional hierarchies: ‘ARCHITECTURE’ or ‘ANATOMY’ or ‘CALLIGRAPHY’ or ‘MOVEMENT’ become interchangeable imagistic headlines connecting the tangible and intangible, organic and inorganic, ‘serious’ and ‘popular’, and historical and contemporary. The lists act as a type of dictionary, encyclopaedia, or guidebook for a new era, where commonalities are heightened and all things have become interrelated and interpenetrating. This new time and place, which presumably mirrors the midcentury world, is one of contradictions and iconoclastic ‘logic’, where a building can have as much in common with architecture as the structural unit of a vegetable. ‘[P]igeons flying’ is just as illustrative of ‘MOVEMENT’ as is ‘The Deluge Formalised, Leonardo da Vinci’, and ‘Study of a vertical entry of missile into water’ (Whitham ‘Exhibitions’ 125). This discursive strategy has an equalising and democratic effect.

As the architect and designer Nigel Coates suggested in his paper for the 2010 Royal Academy symposium, ‘Ballardian Architecture: Inner and Outer Space’, architectural ‘points of contact’ with Ballard can be located beyond that which is ‘built’ (Coates). Articulating the broad significance of architecture to Ballard’s oeuvre, in a 2006 interview with Jonathan Weiss published in *Extreme Metaphors* (2012), presumably trying to access insight into opaque passages of *Atrocity* like ‘Her face contained the geometry of the plaza’, ‘What code would fit both this face and body and Karen Novotny’s apartment?’, and ‘the unusual planes of her face, intersecting each other like dunes around her [...] was a geometric equation, the demonstration model of a landscape’, Ballard was asked about *Atrocity*’s collapsing of architecture and psychology (*Atrocity* 31, 58, 56). In the recorded exchange that was published posthumously, Weiss enquired about this use of architectural imagery in *Atrocity*, and how the structures and angles of buildings in the text overlay and fuse with the human body:

WEISS: The way relationships are described in [*Atrocity*], they are described almost always in terms of, literally, of architecture, of planes and geometries and spaces, things that we never

think of in terms of inner psychology. [T]he inner psychological world becomes literally externalised and manifest architecturally and geometrically.

BALLARD: Autistic children [...] are hypersensitive to the shapes and contours of furniture, of the rooms around them. [L]arge areas of our brains are continually assessing the input of information received, largely by our eyes but also by our balancing organs and by the postures we assume as we move around. A huge amount of information is being assessed by the brain and then assembled into constructions that are, after all, mental [...].

[...]

Where things go wrong, where there's a sort of mismatch between input and the ability to assemble a meaningful stage set out of that input [...], then we realise "My God, this *is* a stage set!" So when [the protagonist] Traven asks "Does the angle between two walls have a happy ending", this is not just a joke. [H]e's applying that to the most basic experiences of life, establishing who we are: "I am me", standing or sitting in this room, but is this an ongoing narrative? Yes, of a kind.²⁷³ (Sellars and O'Hara 453–54)

Based on a theoretical foundation of the Independent Group's thinking, where a 'discursive system' is applied to disciplinary categories, for Ballard, the implications of architecture are broader than aesthetic or functional built space (Garlake 260). Through the vehicle of perceptual experience, architecture participates in its own seemingly autonomous narratives. Placing the stories of spaces and objects on an equal plane of importance as the lives and existence of human beings, within the most marginalised of spaces – 'the angle between two walls' – there is the potential for a 'happy ending'. In Ballard's fiction one becomes aware of the artifice of the fundamental relationship between how the human mind and body process the space around it. The Ballardian architectural landscape is the result of a series of jolts or ruptures, often underpinned by mass media or commodity culture, a chaotic sequence of cognitive dissonance. Works like *Atrocity* create a prompt for these jarring realisations, catapulting the reader to a state of hyper-primitive awareness about his or her constructed surroundings.

To return to 'Patio and Pavilion', Murray notes that within the *Atrocity* section 'The Assassination Weapon' there is a recreation of the neo-primitive exhibition's 'terminal hut' (Murray 161). After the protagonist climbs the 'concrete incline' of a motorway embankment, he finds the apocalyptic remnants of 'Guam in 1947':

Here, in this terminal hut, he began to piece together some sort of existence. Inside the hut he found a set of psychological tests. [...] He went off to forage, and came back to the hut with a collection of mud-stained documents and a Coke bottle. [...] All sorts of rubbish is lying in the

²⁷³ Emphasis is the author's.

sand: a typewriter with half the keys missing (he picks out fragmentary sentences, sometimes these seem to mean something), a smashed neurosurgical unit (he pockets a handful of leucotomes, useful for self-defence). (*Atrocity* 45)

Once again, Ballard's 'terminal hut' is missing the Smithsons' stark pragmatism, although the idea of using an instrument designed for lobotomies for self-defence purposes is certainly a little more plausible than 'A-bombs'. In this passage, Murray detects a subtext about the intermingling of war and post-war life, a distinction that she suggests Ballard sees as fluid, and compares the 'terminal hut' to Quonset huts (an agricultural-looking, prefabricated, corrugated-steel structure designed in the early 1940s for field use by the US Military) (162–63). Murray notes that by placing the 'terminal hut' in the 'post-war landscape as a shelter for the protagonist, a temporal dedifferentiation occurs and the technology and developments of World War II persist, as they have done in actuality with these structures finding post-war domestic uses' (Murray 162). This observation resonates with Ballard's thoughts about modernist structures and World War II architectural design. Ballard attributes the 'death' of modernism's 'heroic period', which he identifies as from 1920 to 1939, to the terminal brutality of 'the blockhouses of Utah beach and the Siegfried line' ('A Handful of Dust'). He writes: 'Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia were two utopian projects that turned into the greatest dystopias the world has known' ('A Handful of Dust'). Ballard's interest in architecture built during the survivalist utilitarian necessity of war, more specifically, the German bunkers of Utah Beach, Normandy, France, was a long-standing one: he had a collection of colour photographs from the 1970s of bunkers, some of which have brief handwritten descriptions of the location where the picture was taken.²⁷⁴ Of course, Brutalism, too, became associated with state power: that of the post-war British welfare state. To this day, Brutalism continues to be one of the most polarising styles of architecture, and debate about the preservation of this endangered architectural style is ongoing.

The Smithsons believed that in the 'immediate postwar period it seemed important to show that architecture was still possible' and that their vision of Brutalism should not be discussed as a style, but as 'ethical' ('New Brutalism' 113). As Simon Sadler notes in

²⁷⁴ Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library.

Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture (2005), '[t]hough hard to spot in brutalist buildings, there was an essential overlap between the brutalist ethos and pop' (33). Brutalism, as envisioned by the Smithsons, imagined that its role was to 'be objective about "reality"—the cultural objectives of society' and 'to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work' ('New Brutalism' 113). While the term Brutalism is of 'uncertain origin', the Swedish architect Hans Asplund has taken credit for coining the phrase in 1950 (Clement 7). Mainly a European style of architecture, Brutalism emerged in the post-war period and continued until around 1975. Banham laid Anglo-Saxon claim to New Brutalism, proclaiming it 'our first native art-movement since the New Art-History arrived here' (355). Its style is characterised by 'large, sometimes monumental, forms brought together in a unified whole with heavy, often asymmetrical proportions' (Clement 7). Brutalism emphasised simple form and a respect for the unconcealed aggressiveness of raw building materials. The primary materials used for the construction of Brutalist buildings are concrete, steel and glass. Although, writing in 1952, the Smithsons may have been the first to use the term 'New Brutalism' and are generally thought of as creating the theoretical 'foundation' for this type of modern architecture, Banham was given credit for 'launch[ing] the new style label' into international consciousness when he published an article on the subject in 1955 for the *Architectural Review* (Van den Heuvel 161; Clement 7).²⁷⁵ In this article Banham focuses on the word '*new*' in the term 'New Brutalism', which creates, according to him, a means of distinguishing between 'fine shades of historical meaning' (356).²⁷⁶ Yet, for Banham, the definition of 'New Brutalism', when compared to Brutalism, is still opaque:

Adopted as something between a slogan and a brick-bat flung in the public's face, The New Brutalism ceased to be a label descriptive of a tendency common to most modern architecture, and became instead a programme, a banner, while retaining some—rather restricted—sense as a descriptive label. It is because it is both kinds of -ism at once that The New Brutalism eludes precise description, while remaining a living force in contemporary British Architecture. (356)

²⁷⁵ When Banham published the book *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic* in 1959, he further cemented New Brutalism in public and industry consciousness.

²⁷⁶ Emphasis is the author's.

As a ‘descriptive label’ Banham explains that New Brutalism manifests itself in other forms of visual art beyond architecture (356). ‘Non-architecturally’, Banham asserts, ‘it describes the art of Dubuffet, some aspects of Jackson Pollock and of Appel, and the burlap paintings of Alberto Burri—among foreign artists—and [...] Magda Cordell or Edouardo [sic] Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson among English artists’ (356). Banham claims that despite having predated the public dissemination of the phrase New Brutalism, *Parallel of Life and Art* was the ‘*locus classicus* of the movement’.²⁷⁷ He explains that negative reviews of the exhibition, which he declares were primarily expressed by students at the Architectural Association (AA), contained the ‘tone of response to The New Brutalism [...] even before hostile critics knew what to call it’ (356). According to Banham, among its crimes, critics found that *Parallel of Life and Art* disregarded ‘traditional concepts of photographic beauty’, that the exhibition promoted ‘a cult of ugliness’ and ‘den[ied] the spiritual in Man’ (356). Ironically, these critiques echo common responses to Ballard’s own work, a frequent recipient of accusations of (debatably) literary ugliness and nihilism. Infamously, *Crash* was rejected by a publisher with the eviscerating note: ‘The author is beyond psychiatric help. Do not publish!’ (Livingstone). More recently, in the posthumous *The Inner Man: The Life of J. G. Ballard* (2011), John Baxter has attempted to conflate Ballard with the subject matter of his fiction – particularly material of a dark and violent nature.

Besides the Smithsons, as suggested earlier, the Independent Group also had affiliate members who were architects: Wilson, Stirling, Stevens, Cedric Price, and Jon Carleugh (Harrison 124, 130). Many of these architects later made influential contributions to the architectural profession and British design. ‘[U]nofficial’ Independent Group meetings ‘with an architectural bias’ regularly took place on Sunday mornings at the Banham’s North London flat (Harrison 130). As Garlake notes, the participation of the architect members of the Independent Group guaranteed that the organisation ‘would be concerned with environment, rather than painting, sculpture or buildings’ (137). In fact, the Group’s contributions to debates about the built environment were among its more influential

²⁷⁷ Italics are the author’s own.

undertakings (Harrison 94). Unlike the scant contemporary mention that the Independent Group received in art magazines and journals, architectural magazines better represented the organisation.²⁷⁸ Crosby was an editor at *Architectural Design* from 1953 to 1961, and Banham was a writer and editor of *Architectural Review* from 1952 to 1964; the Independent Group received mention in both these journals (Harrison 124). The Smithsons report that it was through Crosby's position at *Architectural Design* that much of the materials for *This is Tomorrow* were sourced, since the artists themselves had no financing ('The "as Found"' 201). Alloway also contributed art reviews for *Architectural Design*, and Crosby facilitated Paolozzi's, Hamilton's and John McHale's participation in the magazine. Other members of the Independent Group dabbled in artistic projects that fused architecture or the urban environment and other visual mediums; Paolozzi's collaborative decoration, with his then student Terence Conran, for the ICA's remodelled Dover Street bar is one such example (Harrison 107). In *Miracles of Life* Ballard recalls how, together, Hamilton and Paolozzi 'formed a kind of ideas laboratory, teasing out the visual connections between Egyptian architecture and modern refrigerator design' (*Miracles* 216). As editor of *Architectural Design*, Crosby was responsible for the layout of the magazine and took an evening class with the artist/graphic designer and Bartlett School-trained architect and Independent Group participator Edward Wright, to prepare for this role.²⁷⁹ Wright designed the catalogue for *This Is Tomorrow* and for the Smithsons' contribution to the *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition*, 'House of the Future' (1956). As Harrison recounts, Wright had an 'open-minded approach to seeking new ways of graphic communication' and, using wood type, his students 'produced [what] was often closer to concrete poetry than conventional graphics' (124–25).

Despite Ballard's confident assessment of the fallacy of the American origins of Pop Art, from 1951 on the ICA's approach to modernism began to shift, and as a result it adopted an increasingly 'American-oriented' focus (A. Massey 2). The second session of the Independent Group was 'almost exclusively' dedicated to American culture (A. Massey 2).

²⁷⁸ *Art News and Review* is a notable exception to this statement.

²⁷⁹ Other notable students of Wright include the architectural historian Joseph Rykwert and architect Pat Crooke (Harrison 124).

Massey asserts that '[b]y 1956 [...] modernism was identified with America, and Europe had relinquished leadership of the avant-garde' (A. Massey 2). Many Independent Group collaborators were fascinated by American popular culture and 'New World' iconography, which 'epitomized the "aesthetics of plenty" in a society of rapid consumption and obsolescence' (Harrison 92; Robbins *Aesthetics* 58). Famously, Ballard also was intrigued by American culture, having been encouraged by early exposure to American consumer culture in Shanghai. The influence of American popular mythology reveals itself in his works, notably in *Hello America* (1981), in the stylised American cars in *Crash*, and in the frequent references to iconic US celebrities and politicians found in his novels and short stories. In the section of *Atrocity* entitled 'The Generations of America', for five continuous pages Ballard lists the names of notable, historically significant figures ('Robert F. Kennedy', 'James Earl Ray') and obscure, popularly unknown Americans ('Peggy Bomba', 'George Gaal'). The text creates a chain of interlocking events and names that 'shot' one another: 'And Anne M. Schumacher shot Ralph K. Smith. And Ralph K. Smith shot Laurence J. Whitmore. And Laurence J. Whitmore shot Virginia B. Adams. And Virginia B. Adams shot Lynn Young. And Lynn Young shot Lucille Beachy [...]' (Ballard *Atrocity* 159). The only interruption between these page-filling columns of names are two line breaks, both of which start with the names of real assassins 'shooting' their named high-profile victim: 'And James Earl Ray shot Martin Luther King [...]' And Lee Harvey Oswald shot John F. Kennedy [...]' (Ballard *Atrocity* 161–62). The opening line to the section/fragment also uses a factual assassination as a reference point: 'Sirhan Sirhan shot Robert F. Kennedy [...]' (Ballard *Atrocity* 159). Each of the three historical assassinations listed (the political trinity of RFK, MLK, and JFK) were still very present in the minds of the public when 'The Generations of America' was published in 1968. Similar to Ballard's hymn to the spectacle of sex and car accidents in *Crash*, in 'The Generations of America' private fantasies of murder are played out in the public arena, captured in real-time by an audience of onlookers and rolling or clicking cameras – and in this case by the documentarian Ballard himself. In 'The Generations of America' Ballard expunges all expressions of public grief. This section of *Atrocity* addresses

the violence of American gun culture, and how the country glorifies its goriness while sanitising the horrific events through mass media. Shattering taboos surrounding ‘the grieving widow’, the wives of historically famous assassinated men are drawn into the act of violence, themselves becoming perpetrators. Ballard turns the cult of the politician/celebrity hybrid into a repetitive banal list, one not unlike the droning pages of newspaper obituaries. Here victims of crime are reduced to characterless names, perhaps uncontextualised images, embellished by a few personal details – something which Ballard’s deceased are not afforded. Despite the canonising effects of the premature death of a public figure, for Ballard, ultimately, they are merely names; their higher stature is denoted by nothing more than the honour of a place at the beginning of a new paragraph – a new legacy of violence and death.

In the annotations for ‘The Generations of America’, Ballard describes how he used popular American newspapers and magazines’ (*Look, Life, and Time*) ‘editorial mastheads’ to create lists of a ‘large numbers of American surnames’, which he notes is ironic considering that *Atrocity* is a product of the ‘media landscape’ (*Atrocity* 163). Ballard’s technique bears the hallmarks of Independent Group thematics and aesthetics, particularly that of Paolozzi’s collages.²⁸⁰ Members of the Independent Group enjoyed experimenting with textual dislocation and rearrangement. In the mid-1950s, Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons undertook a project that aimed to expose the pervasiveness of popular textual and visual materials by ‘collect[ing] snippets out of newspapers or magazines of lines and phrases that struck [them] as demonstrating the sort of nonsensical “explosion” in use of images and words’ that were infiltrating British consciousness (‘The “as Found”’ 201). Ballard was intrigued by Paolozzi’s method of collecting twentieth-century images ripped from the pages of magazines and newspapers for his archive; according to Martin Bax, editor of *Ambit*, Ballard felt that a writer should do the same (Vale 39). Bax claims he and Ballard assisted in the making of Paolozzi’s textual collages for *Ambit*, created out of ‘300 or 400 pages of texts [...] arranged so it had some sort of curious logic’ (Vale 39).

²⁸⁰ As Paul March-Russell also notes in ‘The Writing Machine: Ballard in Modern and Postmodern Short Story Theory’ (2012), Ballard’s ‘random construction [...] echoes both [Gertrude] Stein and the chance methods of Dada’ (136).

Picking up on the presence of textual banners and headlines – words and phrases that crackle with subversive meaning, operating in a seemingly permanent state of exclamation – as they leapt from the pages of ‘invisible literature’, Ballard constructed a textual collage that is commonly referred to as *Project for a New Novel*. Ballard created this work around 1958, but it went unpublished until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when parts of the collage were printed in *Ambit* and *New Worlds* without a title. In *Project for a New Novel*, Ballard uses text from chemical engineering journals and magazines to create four horizontal sheets of carefully laid out typographic collage, which, without linear sequence, reference themes/phrases (‘intertime’, ‘pre-uterine claims’, ‘existential yes’, ‘thoracic drop’) and characters (Coma, Kline, Xero) that were later introduced in *Atrocity* (Vale 38–40).²⁸¹ Ballard described these collages as ‘chromosomes’ for subsequent projects (‘From Shanghai’ 122). One of the collages (which starts ‘**T-I**’ in oversized bold typography) includes mildly graphic elements: a scientific-looking graph, which records unexplained, mysterious ‘channels’ and times. On another page, a vertical ‘**T-12**’ dominates the work as arrows made up of small black squares and words point to the large typography. Similar to Luckhurst’s observation about *Atrocity*, the ‘prose-blocks’ of *Project for a New Novel* ‘juxtapose imagistic evocation, found texts, gnomic dialogues and different technical registers’ (*Science Fiction* 150). In the RE/Search Publications special edition on Ballard, the author is quoted as explaining that *Project for a New Novel* is:

a series of [...] spreads that were specimen pages I put together [...] sample pages of a new kind of novel, entirely consisting of magazine-style headlines and layout, with a deliberately meaningless text, the idea being that the imaginative content would be carried by the headlines and overall design, so making obsolete the need for a traditional text except for virtually decorative purposes. [...] I [...] liked the scientific content [of the magazines], and used stories from Chem. Eng. News to provide the text of my novel. Curiously enough, far from being meaningless, the science news stories somehow become fictionalized by the headings around them. (Vale 38)

As Bax explains, the series of collages are not intended to be read or comprehended. Similar to when travelling past a billboard, ‘you don’t read the small print, so the text is deliberately

²⁸¹ Ballard was at the time deputy editor for a weekly chemical society journal, *Chemistry & Industry*, in London.

blurred—you can only read the headlines and some remarks’ (Vale 39). At a casual glance, the collages give the impression of conveying meaning, the immediate impact of transmitting information, but they are intentionally subjective, revealing more about the reader’s associations and experiences than about the text themselves. Massey explains how the Independent Group identified a ‘crisis of signification’ for the plastic arts, what del Renzio described as ‘shifting the value of the work of art from the thing signified, to the act of the signification itself, bringing to a head certain latent tendencies of abstract art hitherto held in check by formal preconceptions’ (62, 140). Like the ‘fragmentary sentences’ referred to in *Atrocity*’s ‘The Assassination Weapon’, ‘[which] sometimes [...] seem to mean something’, *Project for a New Novel* shows glimmers of potential interpretation (*Atrocity* 45).

‘[P]rogramming the psychodrill: coded sleep and intertime’, runs casually underneath the pseudo-scientific chart (Vale 39). The reader cannot resist an attempt to search for ‘logic’ and ‘meaning’ within these fragments, which do at times seem to seductively peek from behind a opaque mask to make sincere offers of penetrability. As Baxter notes, this strategy ‘reconfigur[es] reader/text paradigms [...] re-inscribing issues of textual consumption and production’ (Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 62). Yet this quixotic ‘search’ is a trap set by Ballard. The author asks the reader to participate in the disharmonious process of decoding the text, to abandon the dictums of conventional narrative forms, and ultimately to surrender to inconclusiveness. In a gesture of postmodern self-refutation, despite the reader’s best efforts, the text dismisses ‘master narratives’, instead conjuring evocative images, forcing the reader to focus in on each individual word and its corresponding visualisation.

The original *Project for a New Novel* collages, which now reside in the British Library, reveal the joints and seams that are often rendered (perhaps appropriately) invisible by reproduction.²⁸² Most of the typographic headings/banners of varying sizes have been meticulously cut-out and pasted word by word, as if by a criminal for a ransom note – differing greatly from Paolozzi’s spontaneous tears and asymmetrically angular, scissored

²⁸² The joints for *Project for a New Novel* were preserved in the reproduction of the collage for the catalogue for the 2010 Gagosian exhibition, *Crash: Homage to JG Ballard*.

edges. Other portions of Ballard's collage include "as found" fragments of chemical industry news, which have been attached to fabricated text headings. In the author's hands, the technique of individually arranged letters and fragments does not elicit a sinister quality; instead, the effect is of a consciously mechanised process, like the assembled letters of manual typeset. Tellingly, in the above passage Ballard refers to *Project for a New Novel* as 'specimen pages'. Through his collage technique Ballard spatialises textual experience: the cut-out words and snipped paragraph blocks convey the unspoken potential of scrambling and reassembly. Referring specifically to *Atrocity*, but in a statement that is also applicable to *Project for a New Novel*, Luckhurst finds that the obliquely connected fragments are 'overdetermined condensed spaces [...] endlessly transposing meanings in a synaesthetic promiscuity' (*Angle* 89). Yet portions of *Project for a New Novel* remain unpublished and are not in the Ballard archive – it is unclear how many collages remain inaccessible to the public – and as a result the work is a never-ending novel, with no beginning or conclusion.²⁸³

Luckhurst identifies avant-garde visual poetics in Ballard's collage, citing Mallarmé's concern with 'textual spacings'. Additionally, Luckhurst finds that Ballard's interest in 'typographic play' is derived from Dada and Guillaume Apollinaire's poetry (for example, calligrams) (*Angle* 99).²⁸⁴ Ballard's collage reflexively draws attention to the artificiality of its own construction. The reader is also aware that some of these texts/words were conceived in an alternate location, for an unrelated purpose. '[C]ompounded [...] by the text's incompleteness', Baxter explains that should these collages be read out loud the work's unconventional use of language creates a 'reading process [that is] an uncomfortably self-conscious exercise' (*Surrealist Imagination* 63). Ballard's technique is different from Barthelme's 'legends' in *Fire Engine*, in that Ballard is not using other sources' literacy; he is constructing his own assortment of images. Barthelme allows the banners of text from

²⁸³ Bax was in possession of *Project for a New Novel* for many years and had it framed and placed over his mantelpiece. He claims it was designed to be placed on actual billboards and that it consists of 'eight frames' of text (Vale 39).

²⁸⁴ Luckhurst notes that what situates this work within a 'neo-avant-garde' context is the method of how the text is 'framed': the dissemination of texts across urban public spaces is amongst the artistic 'strategies' of the 1960s (*Angle* 99).

nineteenth-century printer's type-specimen books to dictate the pictures in *Fire Engine*,²⁸⁵ and thus the progression of the narrative, while Ballard's participation as collage-maker is a distinctly active role, formulating a fragmented space of his own invention. Ballardian argot – **'Volcano Jungle: vision of a dying star-man [...] ...Coma', [sic] Kline murmured, "let's get out of time"** – could only be devised by the author himself (Vale 40). However, the cut and pasted chemical journal blocks of text do have some commonalities with Barthelme, particularly relating to the adoption of industry jargon and an Ernstian affinity for technical and scientific instruments (although Ballard's tools are from a futuristic present, whereas Ernst and Barthelme were inspired by outmoded technology). Not unlike Barthelme, Ballard had intended to make a full-length avant-garde novel – 'hundreds of pages' – out of headlines in an effort to 'get away from text altogether', but *Atrocity* and *Project for a New Novel* remain the closest approximations to that goal ('From Shanghai' 122).

Communicating his personal curiosity with the architectural avant-garde and his interest in exploring how design intersects with modernist utopian aspirations, Ballard's texts are animated by coded visions of architecture. Responding to what the Smithsons liked to call the 'heroic period of modern architecture' (a period generally thought to have ended around the 1960s, embodied by modernist architects like Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, and their adherents) is the architect and zookeeper of *High-Rise*, Anthony Royal. From his penthouse, he sits atop the imposing edifice, participating, primarily through his design, with the savage behaviours and peculiar social nuances of the once-professional occupants below. The dispassionate omniscient narrator of *High-Rise* explains:

As [Royal] told himself repeatedly, the present breakdown of the high-rise might well mark its success rather than its failure. Without realizing it, he had given these people a means of escaping into a new life, and a pattern of social organization that would become the paradigm of all future high-rise blocks. (Ballard *High-Rise* 70)

Royal's ultimate violent demise is the embodiment of what Matthews, Pine and Stirling foretold was the fate of the artist or architect who dared to be guided by impractical, frivolous

²⁸⁵ See page 245 in *Not-Knowing*.

indulgences like narcissism or ‘fine art’ (W. A. Gallery 27). Group Eight wrote in the catalogue for *This Is Tomorrow*: ‘The ego maniac [sic] in the attic has at last starved himself to death’ (W. A. Gallery 27). In Ballard’s most extended aesthetic statement on architecture, a 2006 essay for the *Guardian*, he argues that architecture is ‘a stage set where we need to be at ease in order to perform’ (‘A Handful of Dust’). For Ballard, architectural ornamentation creates an ‘illusion’, concealing and thereby protecting people from their true, flawed selves (‘A Handful of Dust’). When architecture is stripped of overt ornamentation (‘finials and cartouches, corinthian columns and acanthus leaves’), as is the case with modernist design, there are no ‘dreams to reassure’ or distract us, no ‘camouflage’ to clothe naked reality (‘A Handful of Dust’). A testament to the perceived barren coldness of ‘undecorated’ design, *High-Rise* vividly illustrates how modernist architecture can be a cause of anomie. According to Ballard, ‘[m]odernism lacked mystery and emotion, was a little too frank about the limits of human nature and never prepared us for our eventual end’ (‘A Handful of Dust’). A self-confessed admirer of modernism, with a wink Ballard claims that no one could ever ‘fall in love inside the Heathrow Hilton’, especially when compared to the romance of the indoor spaces of the Louvre or the National Gallery (‘A Handful of Dust’). In a 1983 interview for RE/Search Publications, Ballard described, with seriousness, how architecture functions as an external manifestation of the inner workings of the human mind, and could serve as a type of post-extinction social blueprint, allowing for an accurate reconstruction of the here and now. Sounding a Foucauldian note, Ballard explains, ‘the sort of architectural spaces we inhabit are enormously important—they are *powerful*’ (Revell 44).²⁸⁶ ‘If every member of the human race were to *vanish*’, Ballard continues, ‘our successors from another planet could reconstitute the psychology of people on this planet from its architecture’ (Revell 44).²⁸⁷ The concluding

²⁸⁶ In *Power/Knowledge* Michel Foucault writes, ‘A whole history remains to be written of *spaces*—which would at the same time be a history of *powers* [...] from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat [to the] institutional architecture [of] the classroom’ (149). Emphasis is the author’s.

²⁸⁷ Emphasis is the author’s. For observations about how RE/Search Publications have participated in the creation of Ballard as a writer and readers’ understanding of his work, see Joanne Murray, ‘Re/Search, J. G. Ballard and New Brutalist Aftermath Aesthetics’, *European Journal of American Culture* 30 2 (2013): 151–68.

paragraph of *High-Rise* reveals that the peculiar actions which took place in Royal's building are not exceptional or accidental devolutionary events, instead they are the first in a series of tower block revolutions – a new social order that will presumably have even wider societal implications. The uncontested ruler of the building since Royal's death, Dr Robert Laing, and his harem, exist undisturbed, roaming the building and giving into his 'wayward impulses [or] perverse pathways' (*High-Rise* 172). The reader is told that this new way of life is made 'possible' by the 'design of the high-rise' (*High-Rise* 172–73). In the book's closing statement, Laing looks beyond his building and observes a familiar scene at another high-rise building:

A temporary power failure had occurred, and on the 7th floor all the lights were out. Already torch-beams were moving about in the darkness, as the residents made their first confused attempts to discover where they were. Laing watched them contentedly, ready to welcome them to their new world. (*High-Rise* 173–44)

Ballard was attuned to the fact that architecture is not just a snapshot or cross section of society: buildings are physiognomic, thus lending themselves to social reading. Embedded into architecture's surfaces, structure, ornamentation and spatial divisions is a society's character and personality.

The Independent Group approached the built environment as dynamic spaces in a state of constant change. They were also sensitive to the ways in which architecture can function as a reflective surface for society. Similar to the Smithsons, Banham, the convener of the first session of the Group whom Ballard later got to know personally, used a sociological methodology to conceive of an equally influential set of architectural theories and observations ('From Shanghai' 121). Connecting Banham to what readers commonly think of as quintessentially Ballardian, Joe Day explains how a subset of Ballard's novels 'describe a transnational, hyperurban condition: a seamless depersonalized cosmopolis not just subject to new technologies but utterly determined and transfused by them. Ballard shares with Banham a futurist's fixations on the latest advances in transportation, media, and lifestyle' (xxvi). Banham turned these preoccupations into a detailed examination of Los Angeles, a place which, according to Day, Robert Venturi declared, 'didn't exist before Reyner Banham' in the

eyes of ‘people of culture and taste’ (xv). In the 2000 foreword to Banham’s influential *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971), Anthony Vidler writes that Banham was the first architectural historian to successfully interpret the seemingly untameable urban space of Los Angeles (‘2000 Edition’ xxxiii). Vidler argues that *Los Angeles* constituted a new brand of architectural history, one that focused on the dynamic overall schema of the city rather than its entrenched individual features (such as monuments, for example) (‘2000 Edition’ xxxv). Linking architecture and human ecology was in itself an affront to the traditional hierarchies of art and academic hegemony.²⁸⁸ During a time when Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs still dominated the urban studies discourse, *Los Angeles* is credited with having ‘legitimised’ the eponymous city, making it culturally visible to a dismissive educated public.

Los Angeles was in print a year before the pioneers of ‘pop architecture’, Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, published *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972), which explored the symbolic lessons embedded within the freeways, Googie signs and drive-throughs of another infamous city reviled by the architectural establishment. *Learning From Las Vegas* advocated ‘architectural humanity and humility’, an architecture detached from ego and accessible to the ordinary man (Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour). Seeking a way out of what they perceived as the doldrums of post-war modernist architecture, *Learning From Las Vegas* was an architectural manifesto that sought to release architects from the burden of history, embracing here-and-now vernacular architecture and finding a crystallised beauty in the flimsy authenticity of the Las Vegas Strip. From an architectural perspective, postmodern architecture and Brutalism are typically considered in opposition to one another. In ‘Learning from Brutalism’, however, Scott Brown explains how through the Smithsons she was introduced to the Independent Group, and the collective ‘came to influence [her] thinking’ (203). She attributes Colin Rowe, best-known for his theories on urban planning

²⁸⁸ Despite the fact that Banham was sceptical of academicism, he supervised Charles Jencks’s doctoral dissertation – which was published as *Modern Movements in Architecture* (1973). As Massey points out, Jencks’s book shows hallmarks of the Banham/Independent Group view of British architecture (123).

disseminated in *Collage City*, with having brought Brutalism in the late 1960s and '70s to the East Coast of the United States (Scott Brown 203). By assuming a location of industry disdain, and marking the questionably urban City of Los Angeles as worthy of critical attention and professional documentation – not unlike Ballard's embrace of science fiction – *Los Angeles* established the city as not only a place worthy of critical recognition, but also a location of a new type of urbanism. In Vidler's words the book

provided a road map for the study of urban architecture not just in its geographical, social, and historical context – this was already a common practice among the social historians of architecture in the late '60s – but as an active and ever-changing palimpsest of the new global metropolis. ('2000 Edition' xxxv)

Los Angeles represented a reconfiguration of how the urban environment was identified. Participating in this evolving redefinition years later, in his chapter 'Taking Los Angeles Apart: Towards a Postmodern Geography' (1989), Edward Soja claims that LA is like Borges's Aleph – a limitless place where all places exist at once – and is 'difficult to grasp persuasively [...] for it generates too many conflicting images, confounding historicization' (*Postmodern Geographies* 222).

Despite the fact that the soaring walls of *High-Rise* – which is often assumed to have been based on a Brutalist building – stand out in full relief when thinking about Ballard and architecture, the author actually privileged suburbia as the primary place worthy of his exploration.²⁸⁹ Unencumbered by what he called 'normal civic structures', Ballard felt that the suburbs allow unmediated access to one's own fantasies and 'obsessions' (Sinclair *Crash* 84). A suburbanite has the 'freedom' to indiscriminately rotate around his or her own vantage point, the author suggested, potentially careening off at any moment into their own psychological abyss – as vividly documented by many of Ballard's stories (Sinclair *Crash* 84). Ballard viewed the suburbs as transient locations of 'uncentred lives' (Sinclair *Crash* 84). In the contemporary epoch, the author asserted, the city is 'a semi-extinct' form (Sinclair *Crash* 84). Regardless of the centrality of urban themes to the Independent Group, for

²⁸⁹ For a social reading of Ballard as a writer of the city see Laura Colombino, *Spatial Politics in Contemporary London Literature: Writing Architecture and the Body*. Routledge Studies in Contemporary Literature. New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.

Ballard, London belonged to the nineteenth century and as a result it was an insufficient means of interpreting 'life today' (Sinclair *Crash* 84). This fixation with suburbia should come as no surprise when one considers that the piece from *This Is Tomorrow* that Ballard singled out for the honour of the title 'first Pop painting, although it's a collage', was Hamilton's ten-by-nine-inch fractured suburban milieu, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1956) ('From Shanghai' 121). Ballard describes Hamilton's contribution as:

a world entirely constructed from popular advertising, and [it] was a convincing vision of the future that lay ahead – the muscleman husband and his stripper wife in their suburban home, the consumer goods, such as the tin of ham, regarded as ornaments in their own right, the notion of the home as a prime selling point and sales aid for the consumer society. We are what we sell and buy. (*Miracles* 188–89)

Hamilton's iconic collage was in actuality not an official part of the exhibition, but was reproduced in black and white as a portion of Group Two's contribution to the event's elaborate catalogue (W. A. Gallery 15). Ballard became acquainted with Hamilton personally through his relationship with Paolozzi. A testament to their enduring relationship, in the Papers of J. G. Ballard at the British Library is a 1992 reworking of *Just What Is It...?*, that replaces the flat innocuous living room scene of the original with a sinister, threateningly futuristic domestic environment. The undertaking of the project was prompted by a BBC programme about artists using computer technology to create art. The collage was made on the computer workstation Quantel Paintbox, and Hamilton was filmed while working on the project.

In the laser-printed digital collage, the titanium grey wallpaper resembles the circuitry of a computer motherboard (or perhaps in Hamilton's apocalyptic vision, it is in fact circuitry). In the centre of the collage there is a lighting fixture that is the planet Jupiter. Unlike the original 1956 *Just What Is It...?*, which features a male bodybuilder dominating his domestic domain as he flexes his muscles, while a stereotypically feminine, thin reclining woman poses for the viewer, in the '90s version of Hamilton's collage the woman is standing on the right, this time demonstrating the influence of feminism and shifting gender roles – she herself is a bodybuilder. Representing the trope of the third-wave of feminism's 'Supermom',

this muscular figure is potentially pursuing both personal and professional ambitions. Her athletic figure is clothed informally in a tie-dye leotard and she holds a school crosswalk sign that has part of the text redacted and now reads: 'STOP CHILDREN'. This could be a reference to the second-wave of feminism and contraception, as well as to shifting politicised views of motherhood and reproduction, particularly in light of concerns about overpopulation. Many of the pieces of furniture in the collage are conspicuously computer-generated graphics. Unlike the 1956 version of the collage, where the living room was furnished from magazines clippings, in this new reality there is one more level of artificiality, one more way in which people are removed from authentic, tangible objects. In the collage there is a computer-generated table in the foreground with a microwave oven and some type of processed food (perhaps frozen fish sticks). Behind these images is a home entertainment cabinet with a VCR, VHS tapes and television with self-referential science fiction images from the 1992 American movie *The Lawnmower Man* – the film's plot centres around the dangers of intermingling human psychology and virtual reality. The view out the window is of huddled, presumably, African refugees, who appear to be in limbo awaiting some type of instruction that is unlikely to arrive.²⁹⁰ There is a satellite dish attached to the 'home', beaming in more science fiction escapist propaganda. To the left of the collage, a man, the domestically disengaged husband, has his back to the viewer in a white dress shirt, engaging in stock trading or another financial service, with multiple phones and computer consoles surrounding him. On the top of the office desk is a small plinth with 'JEFF KOON[S]' written on it, the *new* bad boy of kitsch, and a cartoon-esque sculpture of Margaret Thatcher. On the wall is the famous Pop Art carved aluminium 'LOVE' (1966) sculpture by Robert Indiana, reworked in nearly the same bold blue, green and red as the ubiquitous US postage stamp reproduction of the image, but which now reads: 'AIDS'.²⁹¹ Out the window in front of the man is an armoured vehicle, possibly a tank, with smoke, fog or dust rising ominously; this is a

²⁹⁰ In *Richard Hamilton: Painting by Numbers* (2006), the artist claims these figures are intended to be 'humanity [...] generalized' as starving Ethiopians with 'nowhere to go' (15).

²⁹¹ Indiana's 'LOVE' image had varying early formulations as paintings, posters, and a card for MoMA.

reference to the 1991 Gulf War. In an act of postmodern reflexivity, modest in size and at an angle to the viewer is a copy of the original *Just What Is It...?*. Signed on bottom right of the printed digital collage is 'R Hamilton'; to the left is written 'For JG Ballard with best wishes'.²⁹²

While covering similar terrain, Hamilton's '90s collage is a dramatic departure from the prophecy of the Smithson's 'House of the Future'. As architects, the Smithsons were especially interested in how commodity culture intersected with the domestic environment. For 'House of the Future', the Smithsons created 'a moulded plastic structure divided into cells, in which virtually the only moveable objects were chairs' (Garlake 139). Intended as a 'prototype for mass-production' the exhibit was designed to articulate the 'fast-moving life-style of an upwardly mobile mass-consumer in a newly prosperous, American-oriented, not far-distant future' (Garlake 139). Hamilton's new collage has taken a detour into scepticism, demonstrating a cynical view of science and technology that would have been unthinkable to the Independent Group of the 1950s.

Robbins in 'The Independent Group: Forerunners of Postmodernism?' (1991) contends that many of the Independent Group's thematic preoccupations, as embodied by Banham's essay 'The New Brutalism' (1955), overlap with what was later identified as postmodernity. To support his claim, Robbins cites the loose art collective's dedication to opposing 'hierarchic thinking' ('Forerunners' 237). Independent Group 'thinking' drew from a variety of divergent emerging fields, such as 'information theory and communications theory, media studies, cybernetics, and semiotics', which were unified by their rebellious perspectives and 'a theoretical horizon that foregrounded the realities of mass consumption' (Robbins 'Forerunners' 237). 'Rough equivalents' of many of the observations about postmodernity later proposed by the movement's most prominent theorists can be located within the scope of the Independent Group's anti-establishment methodology (Robbins 'Forerunners' 237). For example, Robbins argues that the Group's suppositions about a connection 'between avant-garde art strategies and advertising' anticipate aspects of Fredric Jameson's theorisation of

²⁹² Papers of J. G. Ballard, British Library.

postmodern commodity culture. Taking a ‘contemporary view’, in 1991, of the legacy of the Independent Group, Robbins argues that the postmodern world he lives in is ‘much the same [...] as that which the IG members addressed in the 1950s’. He goes on to muse that perhaps part of the legacy of the prescient Independent Group is that years earlier they ‘figured out how to live in the [world] we inherited’ (Robbins ‘Forerunners’ 237).²⁹³

Ballard’s Concrete Aesthetics

Ballard recalled that *This Is Tomorrow* welcomed the spectacle of vivacious street culture into the restrained order of the white gallery space, messing and muddying the ‘purity’ of a traditional site of high art while validating the relevance of contemporary experience. In his autobiography, Ballard explains the way in which the exhibition ‘opened all the doors and the windows’, allowing visitors to the Whitechapel Gallery to see their own world captured and reflected back at them. For Ballard, the exhibition displayed:

imaginings tuned to the visual culture of the street, to advertising, road signs, film and popular magazines to the design of packaging and customer goods, an entire universe that we moved through in our everyday lives but which rarely appeared in the approved fine art of the day. (*Miracles* 188)

Ballard assembled *Atrocity* through the raw, gritty power of advertising, pornography and violence, exploiting at every opportunity the unyielding potency of the vernacular, ‘everyday’ image. As William Burroughs writes in the preface to the expanded and annotated edition of *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1990):

[the] magnification of image to the point where it becomes unrecognisable is a keynote of [the book]. This is what [Robert] Rauschenberg is doing in art – literally *blowing up* the image. Since people are made of image, this is literally an explosive book.²⁹⁴ (vii-viii)

The proliferation of mass media images in Britain in the mid-1950s was a unifying preoccupation of the Independent Group. Provocatively capturing the vital essence of this subject, in 1952 Paolozzi staged an unconventional ‘lecture’ or presentation at the ICA’s Dover Street location. The artist did not speak for the duration of the presentation, but instead,

²⁹³ Robbins is nevertheless sceptical about debates surrounding postmodernity and its inevitable relationship to modernism.

²⁹⁴ Emphasis is the author’s.

without flourish, with an epidiascope projected transparencies of commercial advertising, comics, magazines and pictures of celebrities – a visual encyclopaedia of contemporary consumer culture (Schmied 21). In an essay on Paolozzi, Wieland Schmied quotes Colin St John (Sandy) Wilson, who attended the presentation, as observing that '[i]t was the first time that pictures had been shown — blam, blam, blam — without recognisable order or logical connection' (Schmied 21). Paolozzi took conceptual cues from the 'mosaic' format of McLuhan's pioneering *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), in which numerous full-page advertisements are reproduced with accompanying commentary by the scholar deconstructing the image. Paolozzi's approach also decontextualises the work, but instead isolates them for silent analysis and unarticulated scrutiny.²⁹⁵ Although *The Mechanical Bride* was not published in the UK until 1962, copies from abroad could be obtained by post. It is unclear when Ballard was first exposed to McLuhan's theories, but it is indisputable that he was influenced by his ideas. For the Independent Group, McLuhan's analysis of American advertising was a 'chief resource' (Robbins *Aesthetics* 58). Commodity culture and advertisements were of paramount interest to the Independent Group, particularly during the second session in 1955. Robbins notes how, '[w]ithin the IG, "ads" connoted a more general explosion of significant subject matter. The tackboards of the artists and architects became sites of ongoing collages of media images of all kinds, from movie stars to technological developments' (Robbins *Aesthetics* 58).

Preoccupied by similar interests, Ballard himself became a producer of pseudo-commodity aesthetics, participating in the making of image culture through a series of five collaged advertisements. Having applied and been rejected by the Arts Council for funds to publish a series of 'adverts' of his own creation, in the late 1960s Ballard himself eventually paid for these works to be printed in *Ambit*, *New Worlds* and *Ark: The Journal of the Royal College of Art* (Angle 99; Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 67). Also printed in the latter publication was the Smithsons' influential two-page essay, 'But Today We Collect Ads' (1956), which focused on the ongoing exchange between mass consumption, popular culture

²⁹⁵ The 'essays' and companion pictures in *The Mechanical Bride* appear in no particular order.

and fine art. The article expresses an early awareness about the growing significance of ‘low’ culture advertising and how it became a ‘legitimate’ participant in ‘high’ culture, ‘beating the fine arts at their old game’ (‘We Collect Ads’ 49). Dirk van den Heuvel notes that within the article the Smithsons reveal ‘their concern about the marginalization of the role of the architect [...] [as] advertisements influence popular expectations more than avant-garde architects do’ (153). For the Smithsons, the real or imagined participatory role of the architect in the execution of domestic space has been usurped by the colonising effects of mass production. Slowly, the home is being reshaped in the vision of mass-produced products taken off the assembly line. The Smithsons write:

Already the mass production industries have revolutionized half the house – kitchen, bathroom, utility room, and garage – without the intervention of the architect, and the curtain wall and the modular prefabricated building are causing us to revise our attitude to the relationship between architect and industrial production. (‘We Collect Ads’ 49–50)

The Smithsons were convinced that the newly emerged ‘mass standards and mass aspirations of advertising’ had come to overpower the potent modernist utopian association between architects and social innovation (‘We Collect Ads’ 49–50). The domestic dreams and aspirations of the typical resident were being shaped not by the genius of the avant-garde architect, but by advertisements that seductively offered objects to enhance their home, and implicitly their life. The Smithsons were early observers of what became known as ‘lifestyle marketing’ and ‘aspirational marketing’, voicing a reserved concern about the cannibalising effects of mass production and image culture. Their solution for this challenge was for architects to catch up, to learn about ‘[m]ass-production advertising’, and then inventively ‘match’ the intense power of this developing phenomenon (‘We Collect Ads’ 50).

Purposely elevated to ‘fine art’, Ballard’s own magazine advertisements attempt to ‘match’ and even revise the parameters of advertising culture. The works consist of a single ready-made black-and-white image sourced from Paolozzi’s image bank and other ‘personal collections’ (Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 67). The collaged advertisements are accompanied by headings/banners that offer an advert or product ‘title’ (‘Venus smiles’, ‘PLACENTAL INSUFFICIENCY’) and textual blurbs that, in some instances, have loose thematic

correspondence with the image. Most of the images are pornographic or erotic and were printed on the back-cover of *Ambit* and/or *New Worlds*. The first advertisement, published in 1967, 'Homage to Claire Churchill' (a tribute to Ballard's new romantic partner, who herself worked in publicity), includes a close-up photograph of an innocent-looking, broadly smiling Claire and text that at the first glance appears to be in the form of one of Ballard's 'terminal document' lists.²⁹⁶ Instead, it is, in fact, text about a 'simulated' car collision (anticipating *Crash*) and an advertising campaign preview of the subsequent Ballard adverts that will be published. Ballard, however, appears to have changed his mind about the 'titles' of the last two works, and as a result the free associative 'terminal document' aspect of the list is heightened.²⁹⁷ With each of the adverts stamped with the same branded 'company' or 'organisational' credit: 'A. J. G. Ballard Production', the author recasts himself in the role of product seller or image-maker. One of the themes that Ballard returns to in his 'Advertiser's Announcement' series, as he metafictionally labelled them at the top of each page, is the previously explored disquieting refrain found in *Atrocity*: 'Does the angle between two walls have a happy ending?'. However, the broader question is what are these advertisements selling? Are they peddling the regurgitation of obscure images already potentially familiar to the viewer and providing an alternative vantage point or narration? Are the advertisements themselves the product – i.e. seducing the viewer? Baxter argues that these works are

a series of spectacular adverts which boasted the author as brand name (A. J. G. Ballard production). Ballard re-marketed himself and his fiction in consumer-friendly forms – a commercial manoeuvre which the author replicated recently, though with difference, with his move into mainstream detective fiction: *Cocaine Nights*, *Super-Cannes* and *Millennium People* as airport fiction. (Baxter *Surrealist Imagination* 67)

Yet viewing Ballard's 'advertisements' in the same context as a mainstream marketing pivot point is problematic. If anything, Ballard's adverts herald an increasingly experimental phase. In both the 'advertiser's announcements' and *Atrocity* consumer addiction and sexual addiction become conflated. The works operate within a dopamine-infused space of synthetic

²⁹⁶ Claire's married surname had been Churchill. Her maiden name is Walsh.

²⁹⁷ 'Homage to Claire Churchill' indicates that the last two adverts will be titled, '(4) The left axillary fossa of Princess Margaret; (5) The transliterated pudenda of Ralph Nader', but the final printed works are inscribed: 'Placental Insufficiency' and 'Venus smiles' (Ballard 'Homage').

pharmacological potency. Ballard originally hoped to publish his adverts in more widely visible locations, in this instance on billboards, but without the unlikely financial backing of the Arts Council this ambition went unfulfilled. One could argue, nevertheless, that for Ballard the content of the adverts reflect a new mainstream reality, as accessible and sinisterly innocuous as ‘airport fiction’.

One of Ballard’s experimental works of this period, which provides critical insight into how to read these advertisements, is his sole published concrete poem, ‘Love: A Printout For Claire Churchill’ (1968). Printed in an edition of *Ambit* that was designed to look like a broadsheet, the poem consists of almost half a page of vertical columns of repetitive capitalised text: ‘GIRL’, ‘LOVE’, ‘KISS’, ‘SUCK’, ‘HAIR’, ‘FUCK’ and ‘WIFE’ (**fig. 7**). If the columns of text are read/viewed from the top to bottom, right to left, the poem appears to contain a message about the trajectory of a romantic and sexual relationship, from implicitly meeting the ‘GIRL’, feeling attracted to her (‘KISS’, ‘LOVE’), having a sexual relationship with her (‘SUCK’, ‘FUCK’), to social and legal commitment (‘WIFE’), and ultimately to reproduction (‘BABY’). The last line of the poem returns to the titular ‘LOVE’. Due to the design and spacing of the work, these actions or emotions appear to occur in intervals, dwelling on one action or emotion, before abruptly moving on to the next overwhelming sensation. The entire lifecycle of a set of fundamental human experiences is displayed spatially, typographically laid out on the page and reduced to rhythmic isolated sounds and minimalist words. The words are liberated from conventional syntax or grammar and detached from any meaningful context. At sporadic points in the poem, there are words that are only used once, such as ‘ANUS’, ‘HATE’, and in the second-to-last line of the work, ‘BABY’ (‘Love’). The reference to ‘printout’ in the title of the poem suggests a spontaneity or mechanised process, not unlike the avant-garde poetry printed on tickertape-like ‘streamers’ in the Vermilion Sands story, ‘Studio 5, the Stars’ (1961). These poems, the reader is told, are produced by the automated, futuristic ‘Verse-Transcriber’ (*Vermilion Sands* 154).

Yet concrete poems are not intended to be ‘read’, in the traditional sense of the word. Concrete poetry is about visual space and structure: it is about the poem as object. While, as Rosemary Huisman notes, the ‘graphic line has been identified as the basic sign of poetic discourse since at least the fourteen century’, concrete poetry attempted to imbue the poetic line with a new kind of spatial logic (70). As Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari explain in their manifesto for the experimental Brazilian Noigandres group, ‘Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry’ (1958):

The concrete poem is an object in and of itself, not the interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings. [...] The concrete poem, using phonetics (digits) and analogical syntax, creates a specific linguistic area—*verbivocovisual*—which shares the advantages of nonverbal communication without giving up the word’s virtuality.²⁹⁸ (Campos, Bessa and Cisneros 218)

While the precise origin of concrete poetry is disputed, critics generally argue that the art form emerged from ‘two separate, if convergent, traditions’, one in Brazil (the Noigandres group) and the other the German-speaking regions of Europe (descended from Eugen Gomringer) (Bann 7).²⁹⁹ Officially, concrete poetry emerged as an international movement by consensus in 1955 at a meeting in Ulm, Germany. However, years prior to this, in 1951, the Bolivian-born Swiss, Gomringer, often referred to as the ‘father’ of concrete poetry, created works that he called ‘constellations’ in a ‘new style’ that resembled ‘the semantico-visual poster poems’ of some of the Futurists (vi). As Bann notes, Gomringer is indebted to Concrete Art, particularly that of Jean (Hans) Arp and Max Bill (Bann 8). Concrete Art attempted to ‘endow elements of visual and sculptural composition like colour contrast with precise, measurable cognitive effects’ (Thomas). Possessing a genealogy from Apollinaire and Mallarmé, yet seeking to distinguish itself from the visual poetry of the *fin de siècle* and the early twentieth century, concrete poetry was distinctly spatial and aspired to

[go] beyond the application of ideogrammic process as practiced by [Ezra] Pound, [concrete poetry] introduces space into the ideogram as a substantive element of poetic structure. In that way a new rhythmic, spatial-temporal reality is created. Traditional linear rhythm is destroyed. (Pignatari 189)

²⁹⁸ Emphasis is the author’s.

²⁹⁹ As Stephen Bann notes other valuable contributions have been made from countries outside of this ‘tripartite classification’ (for example, Italy or the state formerly known as Czechoslovakia) (7). Most anthologies of concrete poetry take a ‘global’ approach, devoting space to the various international manifestations of this type of experimental poetics.

A distinctly international phenomenon, while the first Brazilian use of the term ‘concrete poetry’ dates back to 1955 when Augusto de Campos authored an article entitled ‘*poesia concreta*’, in Stockholm Öyvind Fahlstöm had already published the first ever manifesto of concrete poetry – ‘*manifest for konkret poesi*’ – in 1953 (Bann 7; E. Williams vi). The visual component of early 1950s concrete poetry was actually a by-product of its structure. During this period of emergence the poetry was concerned with – not unlike Brutalism’s focus on structure and building materials – ‘lexical minimalism’ and ‘language as raw materials’ (vi; Thomas). Emphasising this parallel between architecture and literature, Gomringer writes that the poems are ‘a matter of bare linguistic structure, and the visible form of concrete poetry is identical to it [sic] structure, as is the case with architecture’ (67). The introduction to *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1968) proposes that

[t]he visual element in [concrete] poetry tended to be structural, a consequence of the poem, a “picture” of the lines of force of the work itself, and not merely textural. It was poetry far beyond paraphrase, a poetry that often asked to be completed or activated by the reader. (vi)

Furthermore, the introduction observes that it was subsequent generations of concrete poets, ‘followers’, that were committed to exploring literary visuality, thus ‘seeking the intermedium between poetry and painting’ (vi). English-speaking poets were part of the ‘second generation’ of concrete poets – amongst the best-known are Ian Hamilton Finlay and Edwin Morgan from Scotland.

Yet it is unlikely that Ballard was well versed in the movement’s various international streams and subtle ambitions. Geopolitical boundaries were not the way in which he situated his artistic productions. A lack of interest in the nuances of British concrete poetics, or, more broadly, in country-specific concrete poetics, would be unsurprising for Ballard: he did not self-identify as British, instead preferring to view himself through a suitably more global prism, which was indebted to his youth in Shanghai and subsequent Japanese internment (which included exposure to American POWs). While a fixture of the British ex-patriot social scene in Shanghai, as a young boy Ballard was aware of other European communities living in self-imposed quarantine in the city’s residential estates. Separated by national group,

Ballard notes how these ‘today’s gated communities’ became ‘ideal internment camps’ during the war. He writes: ‘The security measures that kept intruders out worked just as well keeping their former residents in’ (*Miracles* 59–60).

In ‘Love: A Printout For Claire Churchill’, Ballard experiments with the ways in which architectural form and theory can have literary consequences. His concrete poem is a culmination of his diverse architectural interests, seeking to explore ‘visual realization’ and the architectonic possibilities of language and writing (Huisman 70). As Gomringer noted in one of his statements on concrete poetry, it is the ‘visual aspect’ that distinguishes this art form from other ‘flow[s] of [contemporary] literary production’ (67). While more explicit conceptual parallels beyond the intuitive remain to be drawn between architecture and concrete poetry, there are, however, some significant documentable links. Greg Thomas argues that there is symmetry between modernist architecture, particularly the Constructivist tradition, and concrete poetry, in their mutual desire to ‘instil in language some sense of [...] functionality and clarity of purpose’ (Thomas). In perhaps the most developed critique about a connection between concrete poetics and architecture, A. S. Bessa in ‘Architecture Verses Sound in Concrete Poetry’ (1997) argues that the Noigandres group ‘embraced’ a ‘rigid architectural metaphor’ that viewed ‘concrete’ as a ‘structural material of “endless expressive possibilities”’ (Bessa). To contextualise this, he points to the influence of modernist architecture on Brazil in the 1930s and ’40s, emphasising the influence of Le Corbusier, Oscar Niemeyer and Lúcio Costa. Underscoring this ancestral relationship, the title of ‘Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry’ was actually acquired from the urban planner Costa’s ‘pioneering airplane-shaped design for Brasilia’, ‘Pilot Plan of Brasília’ (1957) (Campos, Bessa and Cisneros xxviii). Bessa argues that even the tone and style of ‘Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry’ is ‘reminiscent of architectural jargon’ (Bessa).

Complicating an interpretation of Ballard’s use of concrete poetics are two interlocking, but fairly autonomous, images at the bottom half of the ‘Love: A Printout For Claire Churchill’ page in *Ambit*. There is a separate heading or title at the bottom beneath these images: ‘J. G. BALLARD’S COURT CIRCULAR’, which is a cynical reference to the

official notification of the British monarchy's public events printed in selected newspapers.³⁰⁰

The two series of images consist of what appears to be a 1960s hosiery or lingerie advert – six women in various states of undress walk arm in arm towards the viewer³⁰¹ – and eight slightly varying in size, square-shaped figurative abstract drawings of an reclining female nude by the British artist Bruce McLean.³⁰² These images themselves could be read as found poems.

Interestingly, *Ambit*'s front-cover indicates that it contains two works by Ballard: 'Court Circular' and 'Love - A Printout for Claire Churchill'. However, the previous issue of the magazine appears to promote the ensemble as a single artwork: 'Do not miss number 37 a big blown-up *Ambit* (to newspaper size). All usual newspaper features but no journalists. J. G. Ballard reserved whole court page for an advertisement'.

Through its coupling of advertisement and concrete poetics, 'Love: A Printout For Claire Churchill' brings together both architectural and non-architectural avant-garde concerns. Fusing Ballard's imagistic preoccupations with linguistic and spatial play, the poem exhibits a curiosity about the spatial arrangement of words on a page and how language can assume structural qualities. Independent Group energy can be seen reverberating through this poem, exploring the potential advancements and limitations of image-culture and unconventional spatial constructs. While 'Love: A Printout For Claire Churchill' is only a single concrete poetic effort, the work is indicative of broader concerns within Ballard's oeuvre. The escalating significance of advertising, the competitive forces of visuality verses textuality, architecture negotiating and renegotiating its place in culture, and changing definitions of fine art are brought together in this poem in disharmonious concert. Yet, it should be noted that there is no record of Ballard himself explicitly referring to the work as a concrete poem; it is critics, notably Pringle in *J. G. Ballard: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (1984), who have categorised the work as such. As a result of this ambiguity,

³⁰⁰ Ballard famously refused a CBE (Commander of the British Empire) and was a proud 'lifelong republican' ('Miracles' 260).

³⁰¹ This image had already been used by Paolozzi for an earlier collage, 'Moonstrips – General Dynamic F.U.N.' (1967).

³⁰² McLean has no recollection of collaborating on this project with Ballard. Nor does he remember ever having corresponded or met with the author (McLean).

the 'poem' remains, perhaps intentionally, amongst Ballard's most obscure, and resistant to interpretation.

CONCLUSION

Donald Barthelme and J. G. Ballard's architectural imagination is expansive and thematically interconnected. Guided by architectural concerns, this thesis has explored the way that both authors' writings have formed points of contact with twentieth-century visual avant-gardes. In the process, this study has uncovered how architecture's role in mapping evolving socio-cultural shifts and transformations can be documented by literary means. Both authors are attuned to architecture's coded power and strategically incorporate the discipline into their works as a tool for creative and cultural investigation. Challenging disciplinary compartmentalisation, this study has explored components of the discursive exchange between literature and architecture. Resisting critical tendencies that have overlooked my two primary authors' more complex relationship with architecture in favour of purely biographical or representative investigations, my thesis contextualises and restores the centrality of architecture to Barthelme's and Ballard's creative projects. Developed around key themes relating to how the two disciplines engage and interact in the postmodernist period, my study has traced the overt and covert presence of architecture in the writers' oeuvres – from image and commodity culture to utopian impulses and dystopian nightmares. Seeking to rewrite how architecture is read in my authors' works, I have dedicated particular attention to the interconnected strategies of representation, discourse, form, and influence/inspiration. Through my investigation two dominate thematic strands of commonality between Barthelme and Ballard have emerged: 1) The role of history and the postmodernist's complex relationship with the past 2) A simultaneous concern and obsessive fascination with mass media and the shifting cultural capital of visuality.

This thesis has returned to the critical origins of postmodernity and visited the question of the applicability of using postmodern architecture as a 'model' for interpreting postmodern literature. What has been revealed by this approach is a richer understanding of the interface between the visual arts and literary arts in the postmodern period. By introducing avant-garde

visual artists into Barthelme's and Ballard's creative projects, from Robert Smithson and Tacita Dean to Max Ernst and Kurt Schwitters, my study attempts to reposition the relationship of the visual and literary arts. This research suggests that the visual and literary arts should be interpreted not in opposition to one another (space verses narrative, visuality verses temporality), but as threads of the same plural, postmodern phenomenon. Challenging the seemingly inescapable reductive, dichotomous divisions about the relationship between postmodernism and modernism (autonomous movement verses radical rupture) that have constricted debates about postmodernity, architecture provides an alternative point of discursive access. What is evident from this study is the undeniable relationship – and indeed creative debt – between postmodernist aesthetics and modernist aesthetics. The imprint of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, from the Surrealists to Le Corbusier, can be identified across Barthelme's and Ballard's creative corpus. This is particularly true for their 'experimental' works made from the 1960s to the early '80s (a period typically associated with the height of literary postmodernism). While the postmodern still possesses its own distinctive features and innovations, including a simultaneous consideration of the 'old' and 'new' avant-gardes, my study complicates attempts to claim the postmodern movement as a definitive, radical 'break' with modernity. This point is especially true in the case of architecture, a 'plural' medium that fuses the conceptual and perceptual, artistic and scientific, decorative and functional.

Following Linda Hutcheon's methodology, architecture has proven to be a dexterous 'model' for identifying and interrogating postmodernity. Disputing popular accusations of postmodern social disengagement or nihilism, through the prism of architecture the reader can access a multitude of social, cultural and artistic concerns within the writings of Barthelme and Ballard. While the latter author consistently claimed to be disengaged from London's countercultural art scene (Ballard asserted that he watched the 'exciting decade' of the 1960s on television, as he raised his children in the London suburbs as a single father), the identifiable intimacy of avant-garde preoccupations and influences in Ballard's works imply another truth. Conversely, Barthelme's interactions with the avant-garde are more plainly

apparent: he was photographed by Andy Warhol, edited a magazine co-founded by Harold Rosenberg, and was thoroughly immersed in New York City's artistic and cultural elite. Yet due to the widely circulated tales of Barthelme's architecturally charged youth, the author's own architectural concerns and fixations have been eclipsed or mischaracterised.

Comparing literature and the visual arts has become a relatively established area of modern academic study, but it is only recently that a body of critical work has developed that directly engages with literature and architecture. As with all journeys into interdisciplinarity, there is 'non-specialist' risk. However, it is my hope that this study has respectfully characterised the diversity of architecture as a discipline, and that my own knowledge and experience with literary studies enables new perspectives and points of entry into architecture's relationship with the visual and textual arts.

My dissertation has, in part, subverted some of the stereotypes and scepticism about an amorphous concept that is often dismissed as too new or too old for critical discussion: postmodernity. As Reinhold Martin notes in *Utopia's Ghost* (2010) 'Why postmodernism, yet again? [...] To speak of postmodernism today as anything other than a lapsed historical phenomenon or as a *fait accompli* may seem quaintly anachronistic or even parochial' (xi). Despite this, Martin contends there is value in revisiting the postmodern: '[t]he place on the contemporary map occupied by the legacies of architectural modernism is hardly fixed, and architecture's postmodern turn has yet to be fully historicized' (xii). The same is true of literary postmodernism. I would like my study to contribute to an ongoing conversation about the interart pluralism that characterises the postmodern. This study is by no means the final word on the subject; there are many avenues for critical exploration and elucidative connections to be uncovered.

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FIGURES



Figure 1 – Original collage for *The Emerald* (1979)
Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections,
University of Houston Libraries.



Figure 2 – From Max Ernst's *Une semaine de bonté* (1934)



Figure 3 – Photographed collage in negative (intended source unknown)
Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



Figure 4 – Original collage for *The Emerald*
Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections,
University of Houston Libraries.

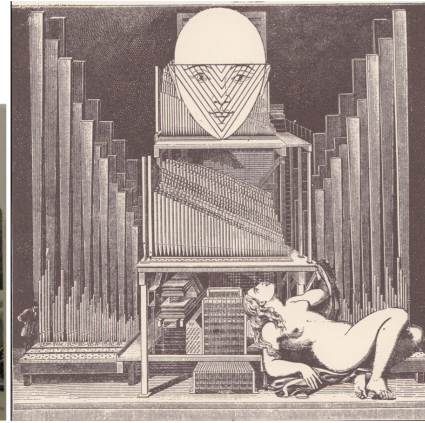


Figure 5 – From Max Ernst's *La Femme 100 têtes* (1929)



Figure 6 – Original collage for *The Emerald*
Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections,
University of Houston Libraries.



Figure 7 – From Max Ernst's *Une semaine de bonté*

