

Consumerism and the Aestheticisation of Violence in J.G. Ballard's *Kingdom Come*

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Abstract: Ballard's late fiction explores obsessively the processes which engender uncontrollable violence and various forms of social psychopathology in the contemporary society of affluence. The present paper focuses on the representation, in his last novel, *Kingdom Come*, of consumerism as an aestheticised form of violence, with a fascist-like, totalitarian ethos, a characteristic product of an age of de-differentiation and loss of meaning, dominated by media-generated messiahs.

Key words: Ballard, consumerism, fascism, transaesthetics, violence

J.G. Ballard's later work displays an almost obsessive concern with the impact of technology, the media, and consumerism on the social and moral fibre of communities, on the way in which our inner selves are shaped and changed by these powerful forces of the contemporary world, and with the way in which individuals and societies choose or are constrained to respond to them. Ballard's typical formula for the exploration of such issues in this phase of his creation is the crime novel, in which the detective process is a narrative vehicle for the gradual revelation not only of a murderer's identity and of the circumstances of the deadly breach in the order of a particular community, but also of the ominous and perverse currents threatening the sanity and the steadiness of our civilization. In an interview with Simon Sellars (Sellars & O'Hara 2012), Ballard pointed out that the twentieth century was "one of the grimmest

epochs in human history – a time of unparalleled human violence and cruelty,” which has proved how difficult “the role” of a human being is: “we inhabit a very dangerous creature capable of brilliance in many ways, but capable also of huge self-destructive episodes” (438).

In his last novel, *Kingdom Come* (2006), Ballard focuses on the sinister effects of the consumerist euphoria experienced by a suburban community gradually seized by madness and courting the danger of a new form of tyranny. Suburbia is Ballard’s setting of choice; he lived from 1960 until his death, in 2009, in Shepperton, a suburban town in the county of Surrey, in the proximity of the M25 motorway – the spinal axis of his fictional zone – and his observation of the social trends and processes taking place here led him to the conclusion that, more than the city, the suburbia was a kind of social laboratory (as he frequently defines it in the novel), “the real psychic battleground” among the various “social trends,” “the wave front of the future,” as he tells V. Vale in a 1982 interview (cf. Sellars & O’Hara 2012: 153). Suburban life is represented in Ballard’s fiction either in the form of a gated community, as in *Running Wild* (1988), where the mixophobic impulses of the more affluent professional middle class create a self-involved paranoiac neighbourhood, protected by electrified steel-mesh fences and by an intimidating system of surveillance cameras, or, as in *Kingdom Come*, as a mixed community living in a cluster of motor-towns conjuring themselves “from the nexus of access roads and dual carriageways” (Ballard, 2006: 6) in a larger liminal space of transience, “a terrain of inter-urban sprawl, a geography of sensory deprivation, a zone of dual carriageways and petrol stations, business parks and signposts to Heathrow, disused farmlands filled with butane tanks, warehouses clad in exotic metal sheeting” (6). The sense of disorientation felt by the narrator, Richard Pearson, on his way to Brooklands, one of these

suburban towns, which “seems to be off all the maps” (34), is matched by the reader’s confusion about the role of each character in a murder story with shifting clues, and in which the crime plot seems to be diluted into a dystopian atmosphere.

Richard Pearson, former account executive at an advertising agency in London, goes to Brooklands in order to make the last arrangements about the possessions of his father, recently killed in a mysterious incident at the town’s commercial heart, the Metro-Centre. His efforts to discover the identity of the murderer takes him into a maze of strange and baffling events and acquaints him with persons whose involvement in those events, including his father’s murder, is never what it first seems to be. Brooklands, a town dominated by the same “transient airport culture” that defined the “suburban outlands” (6), is modelled, as Ballard himself indicates in a 2006 interview given to Toby Litt, on Kingston, the Surrey ancient market town, now “a ghastly place,” which embodies what the writer hates most: “It represents the absolute nadir of English consumer and suburban life. It is just one vast mall. Put a dome over it and you would have the Metro-Centre” (in Sellars & O’Hara, 2012: 423). In another interview, in the same year, Ballard details for Simon Sellars the connection that he intended to suggest in the novel between the turbulent events related there and the state of England in general, as he perceived it: “*Kingdom Come* is a full-frontal attack on England today. I think in many ways the country has lost its direction, lost its purpose, and there are some very strange things going on under the surface” (433). What particularly struck him about England were the deep social divisions, the instability, and the emergence of a worrying violent streak (cf. 435), which he associates in his novel with rampant consumerism and the ethos that it creates. Shopping as “all we have” (433), as the ultimate value of the country, is represented in *Kingdom Come* as something either to be defended and encouraged, because it is the only thing that

gives meaning to the aimless, petty life of a disoriented suburbia, or to be feared for its potentially totalitarian grip on people – “a new kind of totalitarianism that operated at the checkout and the cash counter” (Ballard 2006: 106), narrowing their minds to a single pursuit which keeps them together as a community and gives them a collective identity. In either case, consumerism appears to have a conspiratorial nature, mobilising large masses against its purported enemies and tapping on reserves of latent energy to put them to its own service.

In *Kingdom Come*, consumerism is the point of convergence, and also of dissolution, of several spheres of life. Absorbed in the orbit of consumption, politics, culture, religion, social life, or national identity seem to lose consistency and become meaningless, obeying what Jean Baudrillard called “the law of the confusion of categories” (1993: 9), which contaminate and substitute each other, in an orgy of indifference:

When everything is political, nothing is political any more, the word itself is meaningless. When everything is sexual, nothing is sexual any more, and sex loses its determinants. When everything is aesthetic, nothing is beautiful or ugly any more, and art itself disappears. (*Ibidem*)

Ballard’s novel suggests that this “superfusion” (cf. Baudrillard 1993: 102) of all forms of social energies into the consumerist imperative is achieved with the help of the media, which, by aestheticizing everything in the form of the spectacle, contributes essentially to the instatement of “the transaesthetic era of the banality of the image” (11). This process of generalized spectacularisation is accompanied by an eruption of violence which is, as Baudrillard pointed out, rather a “simulacrum of violence,” which “exists potentially in the emptiness of the screen, in the hole the screen opens in the mental universe” (75). The beginning of Ballard’s novel refers to an unconscious thirst for

violence as an escape from the apathy and tedium of a life in the shadow of the Metro-Centre: “The suburbs dream of violence. Asleep in their drowsy villas, sheltered by benevolent shopping malls, they wait patiently for the nightmares that will wake them into a more passionate world” (Ballard 2006: 3). The subsequently described turbulences in Brooklands are, as is the violence of football hooligans in the interpretation of Baudrillard, “not a clash between antagonistic passions, but the product of listless and indifferent forces (among them television's inert audience). [...] [S]uch violence is not so much an event as the explosive form assumed by the absence of events” (1993: 76). Ballard explores in his novel the connection between this form of violence and the “transaesthetic” nature of the image-dominated consumer society, insistently suggesting the emergence of a “fierce new world” (Ballard 2006: 170), in need of new forms of control: “consumer fascism” (168), reconfiguring social “[e]vil and psychopathology [...] into lifestyle statements” (*ibidem*), fills the void of an imploded society, in which all values and meanings issue from the logic of the commodity.

Before Pearson reaches Brooklands, he has a glimpse, during his brief stop in a nameless off-motorway town, of the paradoxical life of the suburbia, apparently unfolding in a “deep consumerist peace” (10), with its “brightly lit, cheerful and cleanly swept [streets], so unlike the inner London” he knew (8), with passers-by who “seemed prosperous and content, confidently strolling around a town that was entirely composed of shops and small department stores” (7–8). This was a place where “it was impossible to borrow a book, attend a concert, say a prayer, consult a parish record or give to charity,” a place which had witnessed the nullification of culture and which had engrossed its inhabitants “in an eternal retail present” of instantly fulfilled wishes, unsuffocated by the burden of tradition or history. As an advertising expert, Pearson was one who “had helped set their

values” (8), contributing to this evacuation of all traditional values, but he feels proud and satisfied as “at least these Thames Valley natives with their airport culture would never start a war” (*ibidem*).

Beneath this façade of tranquillity, however, it turned out that the community sizzled with hostility and violence. Caught in the race riot against an immigrant minority of Muslims, Pearson has the first intimation of a suburban phenomenon that he was to experience in its dramatic dimension in Brooklands: the rise of a self-appointed militia, combining enthusiastic sports fandom and consumerist devotion into a quasi-fascist hysteria directed towards enemies defined only apparently in racial or ethnic terms. The crowds of sports club supporters, marching and chanting through the streets of Brooklands in their white shirts decorated with the St George’s cross, were “a suburban crusader army” (88) happy to follow their marshals in disciplined raids through the immigrants’ streets, attacking them, vandalising their small shops and businesses, spreading terror among them – not in a hateful and spiteful way, but “good-humouredly banging the roofs of the parked cars” (73), and almost as in a kind of game: Pearson tries to stop a young man in a St George’s shirt who “danced around” a middle-aged Asian shopkeeper fallen to his knees, “feinting and kicking as if he was taking a series of penalties, cheering and raising his hands each time he scored” (74). In this game-like simulation of violence, racial hatred is expressed in the ritualized and theatrical version of a sport exercise, and this points to the double significance of sport in Ballard’s novel. On the one hand, it is a blueprint for consumerist practices, its “criteria of ‘excellence,’ effort and record-breaking” (Baudrillard 1993: 8) and its ethos of self-transcendence permeating the discourse of commercial advertising. On the other hand, its emphasis on discipline, on observance of routine, on ritual, confers it a transaesthetic dimension – it is a form of violence sublimated

through aestheticisation, whose object is immaterial. References to attacks on the immigrant population in the suburbs are frequent in the novel, but there is a lack of ethnic profile in Pearson's account, which creates the impression that these alien neighbours are not victimised for their nationality or race, but that they fill in a blank portrait of a supposed enemy – the “bogies” that Theodor Adorno was showing to be the target of fascist propaganda, which builds up a certain *imagery* of the enemy and “tears it to pieces, without caring much how this imagery is related to reality” (1994: 222). The “suburban unreality” (Ballard 2006: 38) in *Kingdom Come* includes this fabrication of enmity, which is possible through the aid of media technology.

The centre of life in Brooklands is the huge shopping mall, with its “millions of square feet of retail space, the three hotels, six cineplexes and forty cafés” (40); it has its own cable channel, which may reach higher ratings than the BBC (45) and which offers consumers a range of programmes which goes beyond mere shopping: “[h]ealth and lifestyle issues, sports, current affairs, key local concerns like asylum seekers...” (*ibidem*). The Metro-Centre is itself the epitome of the confusion of categories characteristic of the postmodern age that Baudrillard examined: a “hyperspace of the commodity where in many regards a whole new sociality is elaborated” (Baudrillard 1994: 75); a simulacrum of the city, which it has displaced – a hyper-realisation of the city, in which all the latter's functions have been disintegrated and superfused, whose role “goes far beyond ‘consumption’ and [whose] objects no longer have a specific reality” (77). Most obviously, the Metro-Centre is a “pleasure dome,” a consumer paradise, self-contained but irradiating its ideology into the surrounding social space. The diffuse, “healing” light (Ballard 2006: 37) of this “strange new object” (as Baudrillard described such hyper-real spaces – cf. 1994: 78), with its gleaming aluminium dome, is complemented by the night “glare” of the central stadium, with its immense

screen on which David Cruise, the host of the Metro cable show, comments on current sporting events, sponsored by the Metro-Centre, and with its blinding flood-lights, which obscure the night violence in the Brooklands streets: “Drowned by the glare of stadium lights, flames rose from a burning house” (Ballard 2006: 76).

The connection between consumerism, sports, and violence is intensely rehearsed in the novel, on the background of a conspiratorial atmosphere whose authors, like the author of the murder of Pearson’s father, are never quite certain. The characters who represent the professional intelligentsia in the novel and who attempt to explain the course of events in Brooklands – the psychiatrist, dr. Tony Maxted; the school headmaster, William Sangster; his father’s solicitor, Geoffrey Fairfax, medical doctor Julia Goodwin – are all both caught in and devising conspiracies turning round the Metro-Centre and its significance in the community. Many of their theories and perceptions may be assumed to represent Ballard’s own views, but, as usual in his novels, the unreliability of his narrators and the ambivalence of his characters save the novel from being a dramatised collection of essays on the state of consumerism in Britain. Irrespective of the true motives and the success or failure of their actions, and of the ambiguities of the conspiracy plots, what emerges with relative clarity from their conversations is a view of consumerism bordering on fascism and replacing politics, an idea that Ballard himself voiced in interviews.

One of the main reasons insistently presented in the novel for consumerism tipping over into violence and a fascistoid mentality is the increasing *boredom* of a middle class whose range of preoccupations in the suburbia was limited to the constant activity of shopping, “trading the contents of house and home, replacing the same cars and cameras, the same ceramic hobs and fitted bathrooms”: “Behind this frantic turnover, a gigantic

boredom prevailed” (64). In dr. Maxted’s explanations, “[t]he great dream of the Enlightenment, that reason and rational self-interest would one day triumph, led directly to today’s consumerism” (102), which represents a kind of salvation from the decay and loss of relevance of all the institutions of the past:

The churches are empty, and the monarchy has shipwrecked itself on its own vanity. Politics is a racket, and democracy is just another utility, like gas and electricity. Almost no one has any civic feeling. Consumerism is the one thing that gives us our sense of values. Consumerism is honest, and teaches us that everything good has a barcode. (*Ibidem*)

However, this fulfilled dream of ease and comfort demands the rekindling of desire, a re-quickening of the senses: “Consumerism rules, but people are bored. They’re out on the edge, waiting for something big and strange to come along. (...) they want to be frightened. They want to know fear. And maybe they want to go a little mad” (101).

In *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1998), Jean Baudrillard had pointed out this inevitable downside of the society of affluence, which is, at one and the same time, “a society of solicitude,” which obligingly caters for every individual need and desire (he speaks of “a conspiracy of devotion and goodwill”: “a chair is no longer a chair, it is a total social service for your benefit” –159), and “a society of repression”; “a pacified society and a society of violence” (174). The daily consumption of “allusive violence” (*ibidem*) is like a kind of vaccine, inoculated in daily, homeopathic doses by the mass-media, in order to “ward off the spectre of the *real* fragility of that pacified life” (*ibidem*). The civilisation of affluence displays a fundamental contradiction, which has nothing to do with social inequality, but with the way in which affluence is perceived and assimilated; more exactly, in Baudrillard’s words,

always simultaneously experienced as euphoric myth (of resolution of tensions and conflicts, of happiness beyond history and morality) and endured as a process of more or less enforced adaptation to new types of behaviour, collective constraints and norms. (1998: 175-6)

The consumer society requires an effort of adaptation from the “mentality of scarcity” to the different set of constraints that affluence imposes (Baudrillard talks about the “totalitarian ethic of affluence”), which are “accompanied by a new type of demand for freedom” (176). Real violence and delinquency are some of the various forms of *anomie* which seem to threaten “the very order of happiness” (*ibidem*), besides escapist behavior, for instance; but all these forms of “resistance to plenty” emerging within the society of affluence are the sign of a “fundamental imbalance” (175), of inadaptation.

In Ballard’s novel, the violence in the streets exceeds the “integrated violence” that Baudrillard was talking about, which is “consumed,” in a mediated form, along with the rest of the commodities; it is an expression of “the negativity of desire which is omitted, occulted, censored by the total positivity of need” (Baudrillard 1998: 176). Ballard was preoccupied in all his late fiction by the processes which engender real, uncontrollable violence in the societies or communities which have reached a certain degree of plenty, but here, more than in the other novels, he suggests its “*aimless and objectless*” (Baudrillard 1998: 174) character – a gratuitousness that evokes the aesthetic situation. The reference, in the beginning of the novel, to the latent violence of the suburbia suggests that the rationalised modern world of comfort and affluence witnesses indeed a depletion of desire; in this context, the collective passion for sports in the community of Brooklands fills in a void and, like consumerism itself, brings meaning to suburban existence. To some extent, it offers the

necessary vicarious outlet for an ill-contained aggressiveness – as Dr. Maxted puts it, “Wherever sport plays a big part in people’s lives you can be sure they’re bored witless and just waiting to break up the furniture” (Ballard 2006: 67). The sponsorship of sport events by the Metro-Centre provides repressed aggressivity with a structured, aestheticised form, which shares with consumerism an irrationality bordering on religious fervor. The Metro-Centre is called a “cathedral of consumerism,” “a place of worship,” “the last refuge of the religious instinct” (253), and there are several references to the people’s expectation of a messiah, to provide them with proper leadership.

This irrationality, occasionally manifesting itself as a perverted form of religiousness, is also the irrationality of fascism, which is capable of procuring stimulating leadership and approval: “People want discipline and they want violence. Most of all they want structured violence” (147). The street marching and fighting, the riots accompanying every sport event, the brawls and drunken attacks, the vandalism, the torching of the houses and smaller shops of the immigrant residents gave these people the reassuring feeling of belonging. The constant reference to the indistinct mass of people cruising the streets of Brooklands in a state of frenzy as the “crowd” points to the leveling effect of sport discipline, just like the “threatening costume” (56) of the St George’s shirt worn by the rioters, which is not so much the emblem of nationalistic allegiance as the emblem of an illusory, manufactured equality. Jake Huntley, analyzing the peculiar proneness to madness of the Ballardian crowds, cites Elias Canetti and his idea that crowds come into being by the erasure of inequality, which he calls “discharge”: “Before this the crowd does not actually exist; it is the discharge which creates it. This is the moment when all who belong to the crowd get rid of their differences and feel equal” (Canetti, quoted in Huntley 2012: 217). The raids of the crowd are aimed mostly against the

immigrant neighbourhood, but ethnic cleansing is not the ultimate goal. The “aliens” were to be chased away in order to extend the retail surface of the town, but mostly, as Pearson concludes, to complete the transformation of the shabby interzone districts into a kind of penal colony in which consumerism was the ultimate discipline. As the soccer, rugby and athletic teams were competing on the central stadium, Pearson has the intimation of consumerism as a form of enslavement: “Illuminated arrays glowed through the night like the perimeter lights of a colony of prison camps, a new gulag of penal settlements where the forced labour was shopping and spending” (Ballard, 2006: 78).

Consumerism as a form of fascism is what the Metro-Centre proclaims in its channel broadcasts, through the voice of David Cruise, whose likeable televisual presence was a “well-polished gloss [put] on the ugly violence” (*ibidem*): mobilising his audience as a righteous “us” – those who “depend on the high values and ideals maintained by the mall and its suppliers” – against “them” – the immigrant communities with their “low-value expectations” –, the charismatic third-rate actor extols consumerism as being “about a lot more than buying things: “It’s our main way of expressing our tribal values, of engaging with each other’s hopes and ambitions” (*ibidem*). The smiling face of David Cruise would watch the Asian and East-European tenants from the stadium screen as a giant Big Brother: “Everything was bathed in the intense glare of the stadium lights, as if the area was being interrogated over its failure to join the consumer society” (72).

A frequent motif in the novel is the expectations of a providential leader, who could instill in the masses the sense of purpose and something to believe in – as dr. Maxted explains to Pearson, “People are never more dangerous than when they have nothing to believe in except God” (104). As the psychiatrist sees it, people desire to escape the rational world of politics, education,

institutions, and “the boredom of consumerism” into the free realm of the irrational and the magic – into voluntary madness: “People are deliberately re-primitivising themselves. They yearn for magic and unreason. (...) They’re keen to enter a new Dark Age” (*ibidem*). Fascism is what is needed for such “willed insanity” to take off, in the form of consumer euphoria. Dr. Maxted’s observations are confirmed along the novel in the close alliance between sports and consumerism: it is at their junction that fascism takes over – in the words of Adorno, “This loosening of self-control, the merging of one’s impulses with a ritual scheme is closely related to the universal psychological weakening of the self-contained individual (Adorno 1994: 226).

The need for a true, inspiring leader acquires religious, almost mystic overtones. Maxted’s answer to Pearson’s question about the possible führer figure, capable of dominating the crowd and using its madness, is: “He hasn’t arrived yet. He’ll appear, though, walking out of some shopping mall or retail park. Messiahs always emerge from the desert” (Ballard 2006: 106). This recalls an earlier scene, in which Pearson visits the Metro-Centre to see the place of his father’s death and is welcomed by the PR manager, Tom Carradine: “He shook my hand warmly, appreciating that I had crossed a desert to reach this air-conditioned oasis” (39). There are other hints that Pearson himself might be the expected Messiah, such as the moment when, searching through his father’s things, he find a pile of St George’s shirts and yields to the temptation to try one on. Looking in the mirror, he has a sense of change in himself, as if the shirt had the magical power of transferring its symbolic content onto the wearer’s personality – a metamorphosis which plausibly affected the marching supporters when they rioted the streets:

I seemed more aggressive [...], in the more cerebral style of the lawyers, doctors and architects who had enlisted in Hitler’s elite corps [...]. I tried to smile, but a different self stood behind the

shirt. My cautious take on the world, imposed by my neurotic mother, had given way to something far less introverted. The focus of my face moved from my eyes and high forehead to my mouth and jaw. The muscles in my face were more visible, the strings of a harder appetite, a more knowing hunger.... (Ballard 2006: 56).

Indeed, Pearson finally embarks on a mission of reviving the dull spirit of the motor-towns by infusing consumerist ideology with a new aesthetics, placing more emphasis on its ritual and seductive aspects, writing new advertising scripts for David Cruise, casting him in roles reminding of the *film noir*, in bizarre and meaningless storylines, which the public seemed to enjoy. Like the other intellectuals in the novel, he remained highly ambivalent about the Metro-Centre and everything it represented, but could not miss the opportunity of devising a “vast social experiment” (152) in the suburban laboratory. The unprecedented boost of the sales sustained the general exaltation and the influence of the Metro-Centre increased to the point that it became “the headquarters of a virtual political party,” with no manifesto and no promises to the public, but yielding “several St George’s candidates” for the local councils (155). The new order which Pearson helped establish was a “soft” fascist state (167–168), “based on energy and emotion” (160), in which consumerism came to be the only thing that might “hold a society together,” channeling fear and hate and controlling aggression by instituting an “aesthetics of violence” (168) – an echo of Walter Benjamin’s association of fascism with the aestheticization of politics (cf. Benjamin 1936). In Brooklands, “fascist consumerism” replaced politics altogether (with MPs willing to join the “organisation” – Ballard 2006: 180), all social structure dissolved into the levelling diffuseness of the disciplined crowd, and shopping came to fulfill “all civic and social functions, becoming a virtual city-state far more influential than standard institutions” (Sellars 2012: 241).

The necessary enemy which such a controlling order needed in order to foster loyalty and obedience, while never defined in David Cruise's cable programmes, though known by everybody, were precisely these standard institutions, whose powers competed with that of consumerism. The more affluent middle classes from the residential areas, who had not abandoned the values of rationality, stability, and education, and whose suburban comfort owed nothing to the consumerist madness encouraged by the Metro-Centre, were branded as "anal-retentive" snobs (Ballard 2006: 160), and Cruise went so far as to call for an active defense of new "republic" against those who despised the motorway suburbs. Ballard seems to imply that the fascist rise of the "fringe" against the traditional class structure is the frustrated backlash of those actually situated at a distance from power, tied down to the sinister, culturally deprived, suburban interzones and having no other escape than the boredom of consumption.

An eventual explosion of generalised violence led the Metro-Centre supporters to take refuge into the dome and Pearson is exhilarated at the idea of their self-isolation in "a self-contained universe of treasure and promise" (218), the perfect fulfillment of the pure consumer state, in which the total confusion among politics, aesthetics (banalized into the "transaesthetics" of the "pleasure dome" and its media spectacles), and violence is apotheosized in consumerism as a mutated form of religion, as in Sangster's description, with its own uncertain dividing line between irony and cynicism, on the one hand, and enthusiasm on the other:

The Metro-Centre is a cathedral, a place of worship. Consumerism may seem pagan, but in fact it's the last refuge of the religious instinct. Within a few days, you'll see a congregation worshipping its washing machines. The baptismal font that immerses the Monday-morning housewife in the benediction of the wool-wash cycle.... (Ballard 2006: 253).

With war moving inside the dome, the commodities and furniture of this “retail citadel” (274) become weapons and barricades for the die-hard supporters of the Metro-Centre, who try to put up resistance to the siege. In the ultimate conflagration, the last defenders of the consumer paradise, a platoon in St George shirts – a final instance of the aestheticisation of ethnicity in this general blurring of distinctions – are seized by an ultimate fit of “willed madness” (cf. 277): carrying dr. Maxted with them “like a totem at their head” (275), they storm to their self-annihilation into the blaze that was burning down the shops, hotels and department stores of the Metro-Centre, now “a furnace consumed by its own fire” (276).

This impulse of self-destruction is also part of “the psychological basis of the fascist spirit,” as Adorno points out (1994: 229):

It is hardly accidental that all fascist agitators dwell upon the imminence of catastrophes of some kind. Whereas they warn of impending danger, they and their listeners get a thrill out of the idea of inevitable doom, without even making a clear-cut distinction between the destruction of their foes and of themselves. (*Ibidem*: 230)

The death of the psychiatrist, who represents “the theorising wing of the revolution, mixing the fizzier bits of medical discourse, anthropology and pop psychology into an effervescent, rhetorical cocktail and persuading the narrator to drink it” (Huntley 2012: 222), may be seen as a sort of poetic justice, dealt out for the ambivalence of the professional middle class, ultimately complicitous with the social mutations which they impassively scrutinise, trusting arrogantly a rationality which sometimes fails to grasp the whole extent of what Ballard saw as forms of contemporary social psychopathology.

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