The Mob: On J. G. Ballard's turn to the Collective

The article identifies a shift in J. G. Ballard's work from a preoccupation with the individual to a preoccupation with the collective. It reads Ballard's late fiction as being part of a wider turn in the culture of Western, neoliberal states toward a reignition of a spirit of collectivism. With Ballard's work, this is most striking in the novels' depiction of neoliberal societies themselves, and so the essay begins with a treatment of how they are figured. What emerges from this is that Ballard's depiction of potentially new collective forms of life is at once utopian and dystopian. In fact, the dystopian elements identified lead on to a much deeper trait of the work. This is the reactionary tendency to portray the collective as a violent mob, which, as is demonstrated, has a long history and an increasingly prominent present.

Whilst a recurrent feature of J. G. Ballard's early work is an overbearing, quasi-atavistic landscape which calls into question the agency of the coherent, upper-middle class vision of the self, it is nevertheless still possible to trace a preoccupation with the individual throughout the bulk of the author's work.[1] In other words, although landscape and space in general are important in Ballard's novels, this is only to the extent that they enter into a novel interaction with the individual agent. This interaction is summed up neatly in Ballard's self-professed interest in 'inner space', crucial to which is the creation of new forms of life and dwelling brought about through unconscious drives and species of malaise.[2] All this is clear throughout the *oeuvre*, from Keran's abandonment of human civilization in the service of new, Triassic urges in *The Drowned World* (1962) to Maitland's twentieth-century-style crusoism in *Concrete Island* (1974). It is even present in a novel like *High-Rise* (1975), which, whilst it deals with an indisputably *cultural* malaise, is still ultimately concerned with a mass of atomized individuals in a kind of Hobbesian state of war, and it is in this sense that Ben Wheatley's overt, anachronistic nod to Thatcherism in the recent 2015 film adaptation begins to make some sense.

But in the more recent fiction, there is a sea-change: Ballard suddenly becomes interested in the collective. Rarely do we get a glimpse of the collective, or something close to a human totality in the earlier work, but, particularly in the last four novels, Ballard becomes obsessed with extending inner space to a network of subjects, with trying to figure new forms of life and organization from the point of view of the ensemble, rather than the individual.[3]

[1] On the lack of agency in the face of overbearing landscapes in Ballard's work see, for example, Punter (9) and Gasiorek (206).
[2] More laconically, and as Ballard himself puts it in an essay entitled "Time, Memory and Inner Space", inner space can be defined as 'the internal landscape of tomorrow' (101).
[3] And so, as Philip Tew has suggested, we end up with 'a malaise not individual or private, but communal' (116).

As we will see, this is most keenly felt in the companion pieces *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000), which interrogate the possibility of new, violent human collectives through the lens of the gated community (and for which *Running Wild* [1988] was surely a prototype).[4] From one perspective, then, these two novels explore the social and spatial logics of the trend, starting in the latter part of the twentieth century, toward the gated community, or what Mike Davis has called 'fortress cities', urban and residential enclaves which 'come complete with encompassing walls, restricted entry points with guard posts, overlapping private and public police services, and even privatized roadways' (244). But the underlying factor in both of these novels' articulation of the gated community is the violence which is required to sustain the vision of the collective on offer. Indeed, it is this appeal toward violence which underscores the main argument that will be made here, which comes in two parts.

Firstly, it will be maintained that, despite the evidently undesirable aspects of the communities in these novels, both contain a genuinely utopian aspect. This, however, has little to do with the way in which the novels depict the mechanics, or content of collective human forms. Instead, the utopian element of *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* lies in the very fact that the collective form is given such prominence at all, and the deep-seated reasons for this will be elaborated in due course. In addition to this, these formations are rendered in the absence of transcendent structures and hierarchies, a feature which intensifies the utopian element on display. In the main, this is due to the long-standing difficulties of imagining human ensembles which can somehow break free from the restraints of centralized structures without simply falling apart. As will become clear, these two elements of the utopian impulse in the novels converge with a broader matrix of cultural thought, which signals both a reignition of a collective spirit in contemporary capitalist states and envisages the possibility of forming collectivities no longer reliant upon centralized structures and transcendent regimes of thought.

[4] *Running Wild* also marks the beginning of Ballard's preoccupation with (re-writing) the detective genre.

But although Ballard's visions of the collective do, in this instance, converge with this broader pattern, they also divert from it in quite dramatic ways. Indeed, the initial part of analysis undertaken here, and the identification of Ballard's own way of figuring the collective in these novels, lays the groundwork for a discussion of the ultimately reactionary nature of Ballard's visions of the collective, which are predicated on irrationality, cruelty and stupidity, the ultimate expression of which is violence.

In this sense, *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* appear merely as variants on a theme which is borne out rather less subtly in *Millennium People* (2003) and *Kingdom Come* (2006), both of which figure a version of the collective which is prone toward the irrational, violent behavior of a mob, in the former case from the point of view of a laughable, violence-for-violence's sake revolution of the middle classes, and in the latter case via an explosive cocktail of consumerism and fascism. Amongst a couple of other attempts at undertaking a similar task, Benjamin Noys has most convincingly shown how all four of these novels offer different approaches to the violent, whether this comes in the form of an endorsement of structural violence (in the classic right-wing mode), a cynical acceptance of it (in the liberal mode), or a more critical relationship toward it (396-400).[5] However, what this analysis elides is the preoccupation with violence *as such*, and as a universal condition of possibility in these works, a preoccupation which goes hand in hand, as we shall see, with a vision of the collective which has a distinctly reactionary tinge. In tracing both the utopian aspect of these novels, and their more reactionary bent, the intention is to avoid both the trap of merely assigning a critical role to Ballard's fiction *vis-à-vis* contemporary capitalism, and the equally questionable (albeit often stimulating) position of solely delineating the conceptual potency and intrigue of the work.[6]

[5] See also Tew (116-117); and Matthews (131-137).
[6] For an example of the former approach see Ostrowidzki. For an example of the latter approach see Huntley.

Instead, we end up with an analysis which takes into account the late Ballard's rather more nuanced relationship with neoliberal societies and their potential becomings. To reiterate the broad structure outlined above, this is achieved in three separate moves within the essay. To start, we trace how the end-point of Ballard's literary corpus takes some of the consequences which customarily arise from neoliberal states as a starting point for the establishment of new collectivities. Shortly after, we see how Ballard's depictions of the collective seem in some ways to offer an alternative to the current socio-economic world-view. This alternative, we will see, can be situated within an emerging spirit of collectivism which is nascent within contemporary capitalist societies themselves. Finally, we see that, by virtue of their ultimately reactionary nature, Ballard's late novels in the final instance end up reaffirming the very system which they initially seemed to have been so wary of. In sum, what is offered here is a tracing of the conceptual originality of the novels, whilst also offering a critique of a negative attitude toward the collective which is becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary cultural production as such.

The Formula

Both *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* follow the same formula, which basically states that to form a cohesive, functional collective, that collective must engage in violent acts.

Thus, in *Cocaine Nights* Bobby Crawford rejuvenates the stale, almost bankrupt non-community of Estrella de Mar, a resort for leisurely Europeans which is supposed to be located somewhere on the Costa del Sol (33). He achieves this by embedding transgressive acts into the very structure of society, as he explains to Charles Prentice, the novel's protagonist: 'Politics is over Charles, it doesn't touch the public imagination any longer. Religion emerged too early in human civilization […]. Sadly, crime is the only spur that rouses us' (245). Lurking

behind all of this is a kind of originary violent act, or primal scene, which the community can always refer back to, and which cements all the other transgressive acts together. This is the fire at the Hollinger's house, a brutal murder in which four people were burnt alive, this event itself precipitating Charles' arrival at the resort as it is his brother Frank who has taken the rap (22-23; 317). This primal act, and all the other acts which follow from it, make the inhabitants of Estrella de Mar, to quote the novel again, 'realize that they need each other, that together they're more than the sum of their parts' (260). Whilst Charles initially sets out to investigate and expose whoever was behind the murder, he ends up being embroiled in the new-found collective identity, and at the novel's end he is on the verge of claiming responsibility for another, appropriately horrific act of foundational violence (329).

In *Super-Cannes* the formula is pretty much the same, albeit with some distinct variables. Wilder Penrose, resident psychiatrist, cures the various (physical and mental) health complaints of the residents of Eden-Olympia, through prescribing 'a controlled and supervised madness' (251). These acts of supervised madness – the equivalent of the structural transgression of *Cocaine Nights* – almost invariably involve a flash mob sweeping the surrounding, poorer areas, beating up the residents and committing various other heinous acts (161-163; 220). Here, then, it is violence itself which takes over from the more general forms of transgression in *Cocaine Nights*. The whole community becomes structured around the daily acts of aggression, providing both meaning and cohesion through their repetition. The group-based acts of brutality, then, are carried out because, as Penrose puts it, 'the social order must hold' (255). What was an originary act of violence in *Cocaine Nights*, though, becomes in *Super-Cannes* an act of resistance. At the novel's start, we are informed that David Greenwood had shot a series of Eden-Olympia's staff, and had himself been killed after doing so. The protagonist, Paul Sinclair, takes up the task of investigating this series of murders. The novel ends with

Sinclair contemplating carrying out a similar act himself, in an effort to put a stop to the collective malaise, as had been Greenwood's intention.

We might offer two, initial pieces of analysis of Ballard's formula here, one which is very much beholden to the moment of capitalism we find ourselves in today, and the other which reaches somewhat further back. To begin with the latter, both novels are fairly evident repetitions of that Ancient confrontation between the reason of the city, or *polis*, and its exuberant, irrational outside, conveyed so vividly in Euripides' *The Bacchae* (407 BC) (191-244). But whereas Euripides' play hints at the dangers of denying one's Dionysian urges, with Ballard's novels we are given a scenario whereby the *polis* has fully internalized these urges. In this regard, Noys' above-cited approach toward the late novels appears wholly justified, as in each case we are dealing with a different take on the obscene, violent underside of society or civilization as such, and from this angle the work of Slavoj Žižek (as Noys points out) is indeed the perfect theoretical correlate.[7] Terry Eagleton has also written persuasively on the apparent need to acknowledge and incorporate this obscene underside, a view which he again articulates through reading *The Bacchae* (1-41). But it is in Eagleton's description of the unaccommodated, Dionysian instinct that we can uncover a rather different link between Ancient and contemporary. 'The god's bewitched camp followers', Eagleton suggests, 'represent a vital collective or Dionysian democracy, but one which in disowning hierarchies is mercilessly intolerant to anyone who steps out of line' (3). This description would equally apply to Ballard's gated communities, which, while they maintain a slim façade of normative societal practices, have been displaced on the inside by a version of the collective driven by tribal violence. The Dionysian urge has not undergone an incorporation into the *polis* in

[7] See, for example, Žižek's "A Plea for Ethical Violence".

Cocaine Nights and *Super-Cannes*, then, but has completely over-run it, turning it into a kind of brutal, non-hierarchical democracy of the passions.

Resonances abound here, particularly with our own immediate conjuncture, and the further inversion of the representative-democratic ideal of government of the people, by the people, for the people, in favor of rampant class warfare caked in xenophobia. Widening the field, however, we run back into perhaps one of the key elements of the late Ballardian formula, which is the death of politics, as proclaimed by Bobby Crawford in *Cocaine Nights*. This is elaborated further in *Super-Cannes* via the constant reiterations of the absence of moral, transcendent structures in favor of the multinational corporation as that which 'defines the rules that govern' all endeavors, and which so alters the conditions of everyday life that 'there are no more moral decisions than there are on a new superhighway' (95). Whilst it is not put forward as starkly, this form of economic imperative is also present in *Cocaine Nights*, where Bobby Crawford is in fact merely the front man for Elizabeth Shand's budding empire of residential enclaves. Shand, in other words, employs Crawford and his ability to catalyze violence purely 'to make the profits sing' (230). The death of politics (and the link this has to the power of multinational corporations) is, of course, by now a staple proclamation to be found in analyses of neoliberalism, and is often seen as part and parcel of a waning of whatever fragile piece of representative democracy remains in Western nation-states, so beholden are these to the logic of finance capital.[8] As Wendy Brown has suggested, one of the fundamental

[8] The word neoliberalism has become today rather prevalent, and is used in many different, albeit interrelated, guises. For the purposes of this essay, I use it to refer largely to a phase in the economic development of capitalism (beginning in the 1970s with Reaganism-Thatcherism, and remaining to the present day) which evidently has quite broad ramifications as outlined above. But the general features of this economic model are, as David Harvey succinctly lays out in his classic study *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, an over-riding emphasis on free trade, free-markets and private property which goes hand in hand with a decimation of welfare states and state intervention. Harvey (2). State intervention is, however, made use of extensively when markets need to be created or fail. Further, the relationship *between* the so-called democratic, Western state and corporate interests has become so fluid under neoliberalism that the motives of the two are difficult to distinguish from one another. On this see Harvey (76-79) and the above quotation in the main text from Wendy Brown.

consequences of neoliberalism is that what were once representative democracies have been 'hollowed out from within' (19) by economic imperatives and regimes of thought.

As we have seen, the proposed solution to this rather bleak, post-political, ostensibly post-democratic world in Ballard's two novels is to form a collective based upon violent acts. But it is the post-political situation itself, with its hollowing out of the state and its various transcendent avatars, which makes possible these Dionysian, non-hierarchical collectives, which leaves space for the *polis* to be overwhelmed. To put it in starker terms, then, one can say that in these later novels, the post-political (analogous and correlative with neoliberal practices) acts as the determining factor for the formation of the violent, non-hierarchical collective. In this sense, the novels can well be read as a critique, or at the very least a warning against giving up on transcendent structures, particularly when viewed in the relief of states which have embraced neoliberal practices. At the same time, however, there is something obliquely utopian about these visions of the collective. It is this, then, that ought now to be given a proper treatment, which will itself pave the way for a critique of Ballard's ultimately reactionary view of certain collective forms.

Flat Formations

The turn to the collective figured in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes*, although seemingly made possible through the kinds of conditions neoliberalism tends to engender, is ultimately at odds with the world-view that has hitherto been associated with this economic phase. After all, the former is based almost invariably on individualism and self-determination.[9] Bearing this in mind, it is possible to make the case here that Ballard's novels form part of a broader trend in

[9] For a summary of the relation between individualism and neoliberalism see Eagleton-Pierce (102-6).

recent cultural production, in which the collective once again becomes a common thought-figure, and in which new configurations of this mode of being suddenly seem possible again. This is, then, where the *utopian* character of the novels lies, and in order to show how it is part of a broader trend, it will have to suffice here to demonstrate this via a brief detour through cultural theory, which itself inevitably raises all sorts of issues relating to the aesthetic, the political and the economic realms. To be clear, the intention here is to show how Ballard's novels form a *part* of an overall matrix of thought which has become preoccupied with collective forms in recent years, as opposed to in some way suggesting that the novels are representative of one particular way of figuring the collective. The distinctness of the Ballardian vision lies, of course, in various domains, not least of which is the literary ambivalence when it comes to utopia and dystopia, a subject to which we will return in the next section.

The issue can initially be tackled from the point of view of spirit, which is used here in a largely Weberian sense. In this regard, Slavoj Žižek's notion – put forward in his *Living in the End Times* (2010) – that we have witnessed in recent years a new spirit of capitalism is key. More specifically, Žižek suggests that the spirit of individualism encapsulated by the creative capitalist (famously documented by Ève Chiapello and Luc Boltanski) has been replaced by a new collective spirit, one which contains within it the germ of communism. For Žižek, this is made possible by the new raft of digital and telecommunications technologies, which bring about an increasing sense of interrelatedness (349). Whilst these technologies are not a central aspect of either *Super-Cannes* or *Cocaine Nights*, we do occasionally get the flavor of such phenomena, articulated in conjunction with a spirit of collectivism. Indeed, in *Super-Cannes* there is even a reference to the 'organization man', that older vision of the collective-oriented capitalist, who has been replaced, as Wilder Penrose describes it, by the 'mobile', 'self-

motivated' individual, who floats around in 'a virtual hierarchy that endlessly reassembles itself' (96).[10]

Sticking with contemporary media technologies, we might mention here also Alexander R. Galloway's identification of what he sees as the paradigmatic method of thinking mediation today, which is that of a furious interrelation of 'links and vectors', and which is characterized by a variety of phenomena and figures of thought, such as 'rhizomatic, distributed networks, swarming clouds, or impersonal agents' (61). For Galloway, this can largely be explained by the 'network form [having] eclipsed all others as the master signifier' in contemporary culture (62). We might add here that the rise in the efficacy of these ways of picturing and actualizing mediation coincides with a rise in a particular way of figuring the human collective, and thus we have witnessed a proliferation of narratives which depict the human as emmeshed in a network of relations, from films like *Babel* (2006) and *Contagion* (2011), to novels like *2666* (2004), *Air* (2005) and *Generation A* (2009). Galloway's own reference to Elias Canetti's theory of crowds is testament to the relevance of this theory of mediation to specifically human configurations, and it would seem too that Ballard's swarm-like communities can be added to the list here.[11] Indeed, the image of a kind of anti-hierarchy, one which is constantly reassembling itself in a virtual reality, is particularly apt here.

Moving on to more thoroughly political work, we can trace a similar line of thought when it comes not only to the collective, but also a version of the collective which is stripped of a reliance on transcendent, centralized forces, such as the state, religion, patriarchy and so on. Paolo Virno, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, are some of the most prominent theorists of this form of the collective, which is named in both cases 'multitude'. The usage is not to be confused with Hobbes' disdainful, dismissive use of the term. For Virno, and for Hardt and

[10] For more on the organization man, see William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*.
[11] For Galloway's reference to Canetti, see Galloway (61). See also Canetti's *Crowds and Power*.

Negri, the concept of multitude becomes suddenly, and importantly relevant in the contemporary era for two main reasons. The first is that, due predominantly to the apparent disappearance of absolute sovereignty in Western, neoliberal states, the concept of a unified people has given way to a series of dispersed forms of identity and life-styles. The human collective, and potential future human collectives, are thus no longer reliant upon centralized forces when it comes to their cohesion (Virno 33-5; Hardt and Negri 105). Secondly, new forms of post-fordist, affective and cognitive labor create a situation where value is created on the basis of common practices and states, and is no longer contingent upon hierarchical forms of labor (Virno 61-3; Hardt and Negri 108-15). Multitude is thus also a class concept, and for Hardt and Negri it ushers in genuinely emancipatory possibilities (xvii).

These different versions of the collective figure what we might call 'flat formations', whereby hierarchical structures are done away with, and the possibility of genuinely democratic polities rear their head. In other words, the long history of what Jeremy Gilbert has called 'meta-individualism' (70) – whereby one transcendent figure-head stands in for a mass of individuals – is supplanted by a formation which is properly collective, rather than having its point of reference in the individual. The correlative of this meta-individualism is, of course, the state, and the notion that the community is possible outside of this overarching, centralized structure is certainly something the late Ballard grapples with, along with some of the theorists outlined above. Ballard's visions of the collective in *Cocaine-Nights* and *Super-Cannes* thus not only form part of a broader conceptual shift in imagining a kind of flat spirit of collectivism, but also share to an extent the utopianism inherent in such visions. Further, what all of these articulations of collective forms – utopian or otherwise – share is an attempt to situate themselves as nascent outcomes of the current socio-political order itself, whether this is achieved through looking at developments in digital technologies, the tracing of the emergence of new parameters for class formation or the mapping of what hollowed-out political systems

might result in, as in the case of Ballard's novels more generally speaking. As for utopianism, however, this is where things tail off, in that we end up with a rather more sinister, tribal democracy of the passions in Ballard's novels, the underlying principle of which is violence.

It is at this point, in other words, that the novels' utopian stance is reigned in and remains a weak one. Unlike some of the theoretical frameworks outlined above, no ostensibly positive vision of a collective form of life is put forward. Ballard's literary contribution is consequently not to be found in a straight-forward utopian impulse, or even in the reworking of the detective genre, which is used as a kind of empty receptacle. Rather, Ballard's innovation here is in the blend of the utopian and the dystopian, the nightmare and the dream of the collective. Jeannette Baxter's categorization of the two companion pieces thus holds water, although for rather different reasons than she herself sets out. Baxter coins the term 'nightmare utopia' to describe, schematically, the way in which the 'no place' of utopia provides the 'ahistorical, apolitical, amoral' arena in which Ballard is able to conjure all sorts of 'insidious forms of power and violence' (96). As we have seen, when it comes to the specific, highly contemporary aspects of Ballard's novels, the nightmare utopia is also a fitting way to describe the vision of the collective which is at once liberating and barbaric, democratic and quasi-fascistic.[12]

To think this through more thoroughly, we might turn here to one of Fredric Jameson's formulations on the nature of the utopian and how one might go about analyzing it. According to Jameson, an analysis of cultural artefacts worth its salt ought to contain both a 'negative hermeneutic' which demystifies the ideological aspects of texts, and a 'positive hermeneutic', one which seeks to decipher 'the Utopian impulses of these self same ideological cultural texts'

[12] From this point of view, Margaret Atwood's term 'ustopia' would also be a good description of the Ballardian nightmare utopia. In coining this term, Atwood seeks to designate the dystopian element often found in utopian forms, and vice-versa (85). This is, of course, a concept with wide-ranging applications, and whilst it would certainly fit with Ballard's late novels, it does not capture as vividly the various dynamics involved in these as the phrase 'nightmare utopia' does.

(296). When it comes to Ballard's late novels, and in particular *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes*, it would seem initially that this double hermeneutic is all too easy; the utopian impulse is constantly intermingled with a dystopian nightmare, the latter tarring the former to such an extent that the novels leave themselves open for a relatively straightforward critique on ideological grounds. In these novels it is not, as in Jameson's analysis of Balzac, that a fantasy or wish-fulfillment is conjured, only to be eventually dispelled by the 'unanswerable resistance of the Real' (183). Rather, wish-fulfillment in these two novels functions across two polarities (i.e. the utopian and the dystopian), both of which stand in some way apart from the Real conditions of production, and are yet simultaneously, intensely molded by it. This is the problem with which one is faced when it comes to the nightmare utopia, and it is in this sense imperative that one isolates, as we have done, the utopian impulse in order to grapple fully with its meaning. From there, it is possible not only to move on to a negative hermeneutic which, almost by default, entails the dystopian element, but also to revisit the utopian impulse in this light, to see how it appears in the shadow cast both by part of its own content and a critique based on ideological factors. It is to this task that we will now turn.

The Mob

To return to the subject of fascism, the link between this and the type of collective presented in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* inevitably reminds the reader familiar with the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari of what the two call 'micro-fascisms', a concept which emphasizes the 'molecular' level at which fascism occurs before being incorporated into a centralized, totalizing form of the state (236).[13] Indeed, fascism – even though it remains at the molecular level – will become an overt theme in the later *Millennium People*, to which we will

[13] Huntley also makes this link (227).

turn shortly.[14] Again, though, there are some timely resonances with the current political climate here, both in the US and Europe, with the ascendency of the Right in various areas of state and civil society, and the emergence in tandem of something very close to the Deleuzo-Guattarian/Ballardian micro-fascism.

Neoliberalism inevitably rears its head here again, as the fostering of micro-level resentments was a key aspect in the birth of the ideological frameworks which came to support this now seemingly clapped-out economic system. Stuart Hall's use of the (intentionally contradictory) term 'authoritarian populism' ("Introduction" 10; *Hard Road* 42) to describe Thatcherism is useful here, as it marks a distinction between fascism proper, and the micro-level resentments fostered by the emerging neoliberal state, which were encouraged at the time, and have arguably increased in recent years.[15] From this point of view, micro-fascism (as opposed to fascism proper) within the neoliberal system becomes a key theme in Ballard's late novels, and a key issue within the current historical conjuncture. But there is something deeper running through Ballard's novels here, which links up with the quasi-fascistic tendencies on display throughout and also transcends them. This is, as already mentioned, the preoccupation with violence as a condition of possibility for the existence of flat formations, as articulated in the novels. When this is considered, the turn to the collective in Ballard's work begins to take on some of the qualities of a well-trodden path of disdainful attitudes toward the unaccommodated social formation. In other words, the fact that Ballard's late fiction fails to fully interrogate the transformative potential of the flat formations that it figures, and instead – and as we shall see shortly, invariably – characterizes these as uncontrollable, irrational and barbaric amounts to a

[14] Baxter has highlighted some of the more oblique references to actual, fully-fledged fascism in *Super-Cannes*, the ominously named 'Villa Grimaldi' being one example (Baxter 104-105).
[15] It is worth mentioning here that, for Hall (and as we have pointed out above in relation to neoliberal ideologies in general) Thatcherism remained a fundamentally anti-collectivist project (*Hard Road* 46-47).

view of the collective which is at best rather conservative, and at worst fundamentally reactionary.

The history of such patterns of thought is long. Already touched on, Hobbes' view of the multitude as that which 'stirs up the *Citizens* against the *City*' (152), and which precedes the state or follows from its dissolution, is a foundational thought-figure, and we see this reiterated, albeit with varying accoutrements, in all sorts of writers, with some prominent (and inter-connected) examples being Gustave Le Bon, Sigmund Freud and Edward Bernays.[16] Indeed, we have already seen a much earlier expression of this view in *The Bacchae*, although this is perhaps actually a slightly more radical enactment of the violent, unaccommodated formation. Nevertheless, the collective in this case retains its violent attributes as a key feature, and this is also the case with Ballard's novels, despite the novel configuration of the dynamics between the *polis* and its ostensible outside. Put differently, the traditional view of the necessity of an overarching figure of domination in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* is done away with, but the inherent violence with which human collectives that stand outside the remit of the former remains. Cohesive human formations can be formed in the absence of hierarchical structures, then, but these remain fundamentally violent and irrational in the Ballardian universe. The task which lies ahead thus becomes to demonstrate the broader applicability of this argument to Ballard's later work, and to in turn demonstrate how this links in with some similar, contemporary ways of figuring the collective.

And so, in *Millennium People*, the focus is again on a group of people – in this case middle class revolutionaries – whose locus of coagulation is in violence. As Richard Gould tells the protagonist, 'there's a deep need for meaningless action, the more violent the better' (249).

[16] For exemplary works see Le Bon's *The Crowd*, Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, and Bernays' *Propaganda*. Gilbert provides an insightful history of the variants (including that of Le Bon, Freud and Bernays) of what he calls the 'leviathan logic', which brings us up to the present day and the likes of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (49-68).

This nonsensical need develops into a whole philosophy of the pointless act on the part of Gould, who helps provide the meaningless lives of the middle classes of Chelsea Marina with a like-cures-like solution. Meaningless acts of violence, in Gould and the band of revolutionaries' view, are exactly the thing needed to wake the middle classes out of their stupor, to stop 'the universe in its tracks' (255). The revolution fails, predictably, 'nature' having bred the residents of Chelsea Marina, and the wider class of which they form a part, 'as docile, virtuous and civic-minded' (292).

Despite some attempts at relating it to contemporary concepts of the multitude (for example Matthews 133), the flat formation is not as well-defined in *Millennium People* as it was in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes.* But what does remain is the underlying principle of irrationality and violence which is attributed to a formation portrayed as being outside the established order. In this novel, there is an extra element of ridiculousness attached to the attempts at revolution, which is itself compounded by the mixture of nihilism and fatalism shared by all the main characters. The deep aversion toward the collective is thus presented here in relation to the desire to change the political coordinates, and one cannot help but feel that this aversion is being transposed onto such desires and acts in general.

In this respect, there are some close ties between *Millennium People* and the earlier *Rushing to Paradise* (1994), which depicts radical environmentalism and feminism in a highly satirical fashion, and which, as Noys has pointed out, bears some similarities with 'New Reactionary critiques of the sexual and political liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s' (393). *Kingdom Come* offers a similarly skeptical view, this time via an appeal not toward the satirical, but instead the more sinister side of collective forms. Indeed, the novel's opening lines touch on many of the themes already explored, and so they are worth quoting in their entirety:

> 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 (3).

Again, *Kingdom Come* is in a general sense about what happens when the dream of violence overruns the civilized world, when it switches from being a merely latent aspect of civilization to a manifest, predominant principle. Specifically, this is expressed through a direct allusion to fascistic behavior, the St. George's Cross flag, that time-honored symbol of English nationalism, being the main signifier of this. The violent crowds which coalesce around the Metro-Centre shopping mall in the novel display, we are informed, 'the visceral baying of a mob who had scented a nearby guillotine' (26).

The fascistic tendencies on display in the novel are specifically linked to consumerism: the lives of the characters in the novel are completely saturated by it, and the Metro-Centre is, we are told, 'a cathedral of consumerism whose churches far exceeded those of the Christian churches' (15). The description is an indication of things to come. By the end of the novel Richard Pearson, the protagonist, has become involved in a wholesale occupation of the shopping mall. Adrift in the Metro-Centre, the group of occupiers develop a consumerist form of religion, which includes its own shrines and rituals made up of the various commodities to be found in the mall (244).

Whether the novel is viewed as a critique of working class, English culture or an exposé on the capacity of contemporary capitalism to incorporate outside political forces, the attitude remains the same when it comes to figurations of the multitude, or the collective which is in some way set apart from the established order. Indeed, the use of the word 'mob' in the novel is apt here, and is a good general description for the way in which the human collective is figured through the lens of the irrational and the violent in Ballard's late novels. To be clear, it is not the novels' attempt to demonstrate some of the ways in which hollowed out political systems, rampant

consumerism and societal nihilism can lead toward fascistic, and generally violent behavior, which is being criticized here. Rather, it is the fact that human collectives which form outside the established order are invariably viewed as something to be feared, as uncontrollable mobs bent on doing ill. The late Ballardian conception of the collective thus appears in this light as wholly negative, and we get no real sense of what a collective can do, or what it might lead to in any positive, lasting or rational sense.

Civil War

This vision of the collective goes some way to explaining the late Ballard's obsession with gated, closed or small-scale communities, whether these are located on the Mediterranean, or in the suburbs of London. Whilst a radical critique of neoliberalism sees the potential for non-hierarchical formations, a more reactionary or conservative view sees merely diffuse, degenerate micro-communities, bereft of the means of rational decision-making and civilized behavior in general. What Davis calls fortress architecture, or Bryan Turner the 'enclave society' (290), is thus in the work of late Ballard largely a symbol of the collapse and fragmentation of society, in the classic reactionary mode. The argument against this reading of the Ballardian gated community would of course be to the effect that the novels in many ways draw our attention toward a current proliferation, 'not of open borders', as China Miéville puts it, but 'mobile ones, as ferociously exclusive as those of any other state, and more than most' (343).[17] Whilst this might be true to an extent, the overwhelming message of these novels when it comes to the way in which the collective is figured is that of an aversion to the *demos*, a

[17] At the level of the world-system itself, the preference for hard, *national* borders, as Wendy Brown has shown (and has become increasingly self-evident over the last couple of years) is actually a symptom of the nation states' decline in potency. Nation states seek to display, in other words, a territorial power which they simply no longer possess in the face of mobile capital (Brown 19; 24). Again, the general trend toward hard borders, despite the insistence on soft ones, is certainly something that Ballard's novels tap into. This, however, and as we shall see, does not take into account the particular attitude toward the collective that Ballard's novels display.

distaste for formations which take place outside the established order. This casts a shadow, then, on the utopian impulse of the texts, which, abstracted from the everyday, is mapped onto the fortress topography which the novels take as their main setting. The gated community, as a variant of the Ballardian collective, is in this sense a way of conceiving the breakdown of society in relation to the synchronous utopian vision with which we are furnished.

To illustrate the point further, a literary counterpoint is useful here. Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* trilogy figures another, quite advanced fortress topography, in which there is not only a stark, molecular separation of rich and poor, but also various enclaves within the rich and poor areas. In *The Year of the Flood* (2009), there are both utopian enclaves and dystopian ones (33-34), all taking place in the context of a completely withered state, the only vestiges of which are a corrupt, fattened private security firm (25; 31). Even within the utopian, decentralized enclaves of, for example, the 'God's Gardeners' (14) there are various dystopian elements, including, as Jameson puts it in an essay on the novel, 'this Utopia's dystopian vision of history' (8), which prophesizes a continual fall of humankind, ending in complete annihilation (*Year of the Flood* 188). However, utopia in *The Year of the Flood*, whilst it is constantly mixed with dystopia, is not allowed to be over-run by the latter as it is in Ballard's later novels, at least when it comes to the vision of the collective being put forward. From this point of view, the fortress architecture depicted in Atwood's novels can be read as functioning in a rather different way, in which we get a much broader picture of the various positive and negative potentials of decentralization and decline. Atwood is thus able to put forward various hypotheses of the ways in which collectives might function, whereas in the novels we have been discussing here the collective is posited in a set way, with the enclave being merely a function of this.

The nightmare content of Ballard's novels consequently serves as a vague, cautionary call for compliance, and the return to some mythical ideal in which the potency of the multitude, or

mob in its thoroughly negative guise, is kept at bay. If the logic of contemporary capitalism has been to ostensibly devalue hierarchy, centralization and normativity, then, in all of Ballard's novels examined here, this is portrayed as a predominantly disastrous occurrence, one which will always begin and end in violence. This, then, would be the take-home message of the late novels when it comes to collective forms of life. Ultimately, it is a message which ends up placing a higher value on the status quo, as the cautionary tale functions to make the existing order, despite its varying potentials, seem rather more appealing. Whilst the novels may well appear at various points to offer a critique of the consequences of neoliberalism, the overall effect is to reaffirm this state of affairs and to re-inscribe it with an air of legitimacy. As it happens, there are many contemporary avatars of the sentiment expressed in Ballard's work here, and so before making some concluding remarks it is useful to turn to some of these, both to situate further Ballard's turn toward the collective within an historical continuum, but also to draw out some of the last remaining conceptual complexities.

Peter Sloterdijk's *Rage and Time* (2010) is a good case in point. Throughout, Sloterdijk is concerned with producing an entire psycho-political rubric around rage, or *thymus* (12). The result is a kind of metaphysics of motivation, which demonstrates how rage, supposedly, can be stored up and used for political ends at the level of large-scale collectives. Thus, for example, Bolshevism (and eventually the Soviet Union) was sustained by the mechanism of the party, which articulated class consciousness and stored up rage to be used at opportune revolutionary moments (132-33). The political projects of the Twentieth Century heralded the era of the centrality of rage for Sloterdijk, and if we are now in an era in which the center has fallen apart, then rage has followed the same course (203-06). To illustrate this dispersal of rage in the contemporary situation, Sloterdijk invokes the 2005 *banlieue* riots in Paris, which for him were not only lacking in any real purpose (other than 'provocative vandalism fun'), but were also wholly disowned by French political parties (206). From this point of view, the riots in France

form part of a broader, at the very least European-wide, pattern of behavior which is best summed up for Sloterdijk by what Hans Magnus Enzensberger has called ‘molecular civil war’ (qtd. in Sloterdijk 210).

Sloterdijk’s position here is a rather strange one, in which the waning of official rage is almost something to be lamented in the face of the dispersion of rage, despite the inherently destructive nature of both, at least as it is presented in his book. But, in between the fatalistic musings of *Rage and Time*, there is a glimmer of the old Hobbesian disdain for the illegitimate multitude which falls outside the political order of things. The notion of molecular civil war compounds this, and yet adds something new to the Hobbesian scenario, in that here we are concerned with a *tribal* war of all against all, in which the collective is a fundamental factor which, nevertheless, remains at the size of the enclave.

Molecular civil war might well be the ultimate logic of Ballard’s late novels, and we can see the germ of this idea throughout the four main works discussed here. Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*, with its various warring factions and enclaves, might well be read in this light too, albeit with the proviso that it is lacking the distinct reactionary tinge present in both Sloterdijk’s and Ballard’s writings. Another novel which comes closer to the sentiment expressed in Ballard’s work, and in which the idea of civil war is explored quite literally, is Michel Houellebecq’s recent *Submission*. Here, another kind of molecular civil war is brought about through the representative-democratic system itself. When a newly formed Muslim Brotherhood party and the *Front National* reach a draw in the presidential elections, the government allows various confrontations and acts of terrorism to take place in order to disrupt the electoral process (116-117). The narrator at some point even decides it might be a good idea to leave, and go to Spain, where ‘civil war would be slightly less imminent’ (105). The implication is relatively clear here, this being that the representative-democratic system is the cause of civil war and general degeneration, as it both allows extremism into power and initiates civil war as the only possible

antidote to that extremism. Indeed, the reference to Spain would imply that, in the novel at least, this phenomenon is not limited to France.

Nevertheless, France – and Paris in particular – seems often to be the locus of these millenarian visions, and thus we have even Bernard Stiegler who, again, reads the 2005 riots in France as being the result of having to 'suffer' the deep 'irrationality' of having nothing to hope for. For Stiegler, these particular riots signal the potential for many more of their kind, and there is therefore a need to 'implement a new political and economic rationality in France, in Europe, and throughout the entire capitalist and industrial world' (17). All of these examples display a classic reactionary sentiment, which in essence holds that society is degenerating, and that we need in some way to restore (an often phantom) order. The reasons as to why this is posited are instructive. Like Ballard, all of these writers suggest that these violent outbursts come about as a result of, or are at least related to some kind of post-political scenario. This is so whether it is as a result of (in the case of Sloterdijk) an absence of places to store rage (203), or (in the case of Stiegler) a rampant case of disaffection caused by an out of control, affective economy (85-7), or (in Houellebecq's case) a dislocation from politics itself, along with a degenerative representative-democratic system (39; 63).

For all their preoccupation with what amounts to a post-political era, these proclamations are themselves utterly political, particularly in the case of Sloterdijk and Stiegler. This can be seen, for example, in the view of the riot as something which is wholly removed from politics as such. Granted, the riots which took place in Paris in 2005, or London (and elsewhere in the UK) in 2011 were not driven by a political idea. But they were still very much driven by political decisions and relations. At the same time, such occurrences, as Alain Badiou has pointed out, at the most suggest the possibility of 'an historical riot' which changes the parameters of the current politics, or at the very least 'indicate[s] that the existing society […]

does not possess the means altogether to prevent the advent of an historical sign of rebellion in the desolate spaces for which it is responsible' (26).

We thus run up against the concept of multitude again here, which as we have seen is a rather more positive concept than that of the 'mobbish' descriptions outlined up until now. Bearing this in mind, what all of these apocalyptic visions of the collective quite simply suggest is a fear of an unhinged underclass, which has the potential to completely reconfigure the status quo. Ballard's late novels, as we have seen, certainly take part (albeit sometimes with a hint of satire) in this apocalyptic way of conceiving collectivities which fall outside of the established order. But, as we have also seen, these novels do participate in a degree of utopianism, and in this sense they are not as clear-cut as the other writings surveyed. Further, Ballard is not interested in any particular class of people. In this sense, the fear of an unhinged multitude becomes, at best, a much more general preoccupation, rather than simply a form of class phobia. Finally, Ballard's versions of the collective are ultimately speculative; the late novels are tuned toward the future possibilities of new collective forms, and in this sense, they present a strange blend of the reactionary and the futurist world-view, a blend which complements the nightmare utopianism on display throughout.

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