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Urban Landscape as the Embodiment of Social and Psychological Entropy in J. G. Ballard's *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes*

Abstract

The fiction of J. G. Ballard closely examines contemporary environmental and climate change issues through the author's consistent juxtaposition of natural and urban settings, which are often associated with individuals on both a personal and global level. While his early works – cli-fi novels – primarily focus on global-scale physical catastrophes caused by human activities, his later works – urban disaster and urban violence novels – portray the urban catastrophe that threatens to invade man's personal sphere. This inquiry attempts to demonstrate that the inhabitants of the enclosed societies portrayed in Ballard's urban violence novels, namely *Cocaine Nights* (1996) and *Super-Cannes* (2000), are inexorably drifting toward a state of social and psychological entropy. These communities strive to condition their cognitive framework to align with the sterile and impersonal urban environment, thereby eliciting us to envisage incessant reciprocity with the milieu. By introducing the concept of 'trans-corporeality' to connote the fundamental nature of the symbiotic relationship between humans and the 'more-than-human' world, and the consequent blurring of boundaries between body and environment, this paper aims to illuminate the critical significance of environmental health and the notion that the human body (or psyche) is inextricably intertwined with its surroundings.

Keywords: fourth wave ecocriticism, trans-corporeality, urban landscape, environmental health, urban violence

According to Sarah McFarland, in ‘ecocollapse fiction,’ a relatively new trend in ecocriticism in literature, post-apocalyptic scenarios are treated as realistic speculations of human extinction, where positive outcomes such as the possibility of human survival and social rebirth indicating a happy ending are no longer offered (14). Ballard’s urban violence novels are likely to fit into this category, as his protagonists fail to follow the pattern established in traditional post-apocalyptic fiction where, in McFarland’s words, a “heroic leader of a group of ‘good’ survivors” overcomes the “catastrophe,” whereby a somewhat brighter future for the human race is suggested (10). The plot of these novels deploys and intertwines the motive of ecocollapse in the futuristic enclaves in which the residents need to uncover what it would mean to be human in an anthropogenic “climate-changed world [...] when there is no redemptive ending” (McFarland 7). Here, “denatured ecosystems,” in McFarland’s words, are reflected in urban, zero-waste gated communities engrossed in novel therapies, violence, crime, and murders, thus presenting the world that “cannot sustain the human futures symbolized by new births” (14). As such, they deal with ecoprecarity and marginalization of human psyche and morality, which eventually reflects on “vastly diminished ecosystems,” leaving terminal effects. According to Thomas Knowles, Ballard’s urban violence novels depict the consequences of human and media manipulation of urban spaces, which leads to a dystopian future where the boundaries between natural and artificial are blurred (351). This can be seen as a reflection of the potential collapse of the natural world due to human actions, which is the primary concern of the ecocritical perspective.

As we examine Ballard’s “terminal new Edens” (Wilson 153), we will see a paradoxical idea emerge – in order to “destroy the world [we] must first summon it into being” (MacFarlane xii). The act of summoning the world into existence suggests that the dystopian and destructive societies depicted in these novels are not mere cautionary tales but rather a reflection of a society that has already been summoned into being. In this case, it represents the creation of a world that prioritizes technological advancement and materialism over nature and human connection. The paradox lies in the fact that in creating a world that has the potential for destruction, we may ultimately be responsible for its demise. If humans continue to ignore the detrimental impact of their actions on the environment, it could ultimately result in the collapse of ecosystems, as

McFarland argues, making it impossible for humans to survive (14). The urban settings in Ballard's urban violence novels traumatize the characters to the extent that it poses a risk to people's mental health and to human extinction. This risk presupposes hostility towards other species or nations, endangering human hegemony. As a result, Ballard's gated communities do not welcome "outsiders" due to their incompatible psychology. This paper aims to demonstrate that these narratives blur the boundaries between the body and the environment, as suggested by the notion of 'trans-corporeality,' and prompts us to revalue and transform our understanding of the relationship between humans and the nonhuman world. By highlighting the ways in which humans, domestic spaces, and the environment merge, this paper aims to shed light on environmental illness as a phenomenon of the twenty-first century and the fact that public health is largely dependent on environmental health.

The roots of these ideas are initially traced and developed^[1] within the fourth wave of ecocriticism^[1] (2008-present) that, in the field of literature, focuses on the analysis of the literary texts addressing the social issues concomitant with environmental issues. The new direction in contemporary ecocriticism, launched by Stacy Alaimo's notion of 'trans-corporeality' (Slovic 443), is often associated with material ecocriticism and the new call to human-nature co-extensiveness. According to Stacy Alaimo, the human body is not separate from the natural world but rather intertwined with it. As Alaimo puts it, "the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" ("Trans-corporeal Feminisms" 238). This view emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans and non-human entities, recognizing the environment as a living organism with its own needs and actions rather than merely a resource for human use. Therefore, in Alaimo's words, nature should not be seen as an "inert, empty space" but as a "world of fleshy beings" (Bodily Natures 2). The relationship between the environment and humans is more complex than the idea that one conditions the other. The binary oppositions of prioritizing nature as a supreme force that renders humans powerless or the anthropocentric view of humans taking control over nature as a mere resource offer no viable solution to the problems arising from humans' inability to understand their bond with the environment.

Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality emphasizes the importance of recognizing the relationship between human bodies and the environment to prevent slipping into these binary oppositions.

Ballard's urban violence quadrilogy^[2] portrays humans living in a denatured environment that conditions their behavior, generating people whose counternatural actions and illicit deeds make them become "waste" themselves. Since the analysis of the urban landscape in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* highlights how the physical and psychological environment of the gated communities impacts the characters' well-being, they seem likely to be examined through the lens of the fourth wave of ecocriticism that focuses on public and environmental health, as it acknowledges the importance of investigating how the environment impacts human health. The gated communities are a manifestation of social and psychological entropy because they isolate the residents from the natural environment and promote a technologically dominant order that causes harm to both individuals and the community as a whole.

The examination of the impact of the urban landscape on human health is crucial in understanding the complex relationship between humans and their environment and how this relationship can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. The apocalyptic images of the city in Ballard's catastrophe novels signal the divorce between "humans and city, between human being as biological entity and civilization" (Rossi 84) and point to a complete transfiguration of civilization into a jungle. Ballard's urban disaster novels, on the other hand, emphasize a somewhat different form of separation that is now occurring between humans and nature. His residents identify themselves with denatured environments embodied in artificial "sports stadiums, high rise blocks and closed communities" (Škobo and Đukić 92). The physical entropy, dominant in his cli-fi novels and evident in a disfiguration of the natural landscapes by natural disasters, is replaced by the social entropy caused by denatured and chaotic man-made urban landscapes. In Ballard's urban disaster novels, the physical entities that make up the urban landscape, such as cars, motorways, skyscrapers, business parks, and resorts, represent the social and psychological detachment of human beings, indicating an environment that is severely compromised (Škobo and Đukić 92). Ballard's urban violence quadrilogy delves deeper into these ideas and the notion of psychological entropy and mental disorder that arise from the human-centric approach to the natural environment. It reveals the presence of the concept of trans-corporeal space in a more nuanced form of environmental illness that affects the zero-waste gated communities. It offers a glimpse of a possible future for humanity, where people cluster together in gated communities that are likely to

emerge in urban areas due to the blurring lines between beneficial and harmful technologies. The ultra-modern enclaves embody the ultimate man-made creations, born out of humans' alignment with the city and their separation from nature. The residents of these communities are in constant "consumption" and are "consumed" by their environment, which is exhibited in their continuous physical and mental interaction with their urban surroundings. The notion that the external paradise fails to provide an internal one is reflected in the absence of proper moral, emotional, and spiritual guidance among the residents, leading to an internal hell. The utopia created by the transformation of the natural environment is artificial and lacks authenticity. The alienation of people from nature results in their destruction of it and the emergence of environmental illness. Ultimately, this leads to the destruction of the "children" of their own creation – the cities – as the eruption of urban violence becomes detrimental to their mental health.

Cocaine Nights and Super-Cannes differ from dump wastes and locations affected by natural disasters in that they take place in closed, "zero-waste" communities that appear perfect but ultimately foster social and psychological entropy. Social entropy, which represents the decline of civilization, encompasses various negative behaviors such as alienation, anomie, and deviance and has a disordering effect on a particular social structure. Entropy's implications are pessimistic, suggesting that humans are adapting to future isolation due to the inevitable progress of technology and that they are readily embracing nonsense and collective madness, which are obstacles to achieving any form of coherent structure. Csíkszentmihályi's concept of psychic entropy is relevant to the selected novels, as it refers to a state of inner disorder that impairs the self's effectiveness and weakens its ability to sustain attention over time (54). This notion of disorder is evident in the characters of the novels, who struggle with integrating and organizing their inner selves due to the disorganizing effect of their environment. Essentially, the zero-waste communities in the selected Ballard's urban violence novels provide an apt environment for inducing and sustaining such behaviors. The principally negative technological effect reflects human alienation, loss of purpose in life, the disintegration of the human mind, and above all, the disorder in communal life. These settings breed and embrace madness and transgression as a welcome change to the exhausted human spirit that needs revolutionary and fresh ideas to spur it.

Dump wastes are replaced by empty swimming pools, which figuratively reflect the state of the human psyche and spirit. Ecocollapse is embodied in artificiality as one of the central motifs in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Canne*, symbolizing man's indifference and hostility to nature and his endeavors to "denature" the environment he is part of. The aforementioned artificiality does not pertain solely to natural and urban landscapes but to human emotions and behaviors that are becoming completely numb. The idea is conveyed in *Cocaine Nights* through the use of absurdity; the extravagant Estrella de Mar resort is described as "the emotionless realm, where the entropic current soothed the surfaces of a thousand swimming pools" (Ballard, CN 32). In this place, even though "the sea's only two hundred yards away," it is noteworthy that "none of the villas looks out onto the beach" (Ballard, CN 210). The villas are encircled by unused empty pools, as spending time there may require socializing with people. The man not only caused certain changes in his natural environment that have led to environmental illness but he himself – through his lifestyle and trends that support different forms of alienation from nature in all aspects of life and refusing to acknowledge the strength of the bond between his body and his surroundings, the human and more-than-human world – has also changed to match the altered surroundings. Environmental health affects public health, and any harm caused to the environment automatically triggers damage to people's health. Therefore, in the context of Ballard's urban violence tetralogy, Alaimo's statement that living places should never be regarded as "merely background" but as active participants in the lives of individuals is a viable standpoint.

The retirement oasis Estrella de Mar, on Spain's Costa del Sol, is a community in which environmental imbalance is primarily triggered by the technological treatment of urban settings. It is a residential haven in which society has succumbed to a technologically dominant order that causes societal harm that cannot be mitigated. This phenomenon emphasizes the inextricable link between environmental health and human health and explains how the transfiguration of space affects humans. With British and French expatriates organizing lavish parties that promise the revival of the place, and streets and buzzing nightlife full of illicit activities, the existence of nature is evoked in amateur porn films entitled "The Wildlife of Residencia Costasol" (Ballard, CN 110). This is a sarcastic recollection of the nature association, and the novel teaches us that there are not many accounts of natural space, as it was transformed with the futuristic cities.

On the surface, Estrella de Mar represents a retirement paradise in which “architecture [is] dedicated to the abolition of time, as befitted the ageing population of the retirement havens and even wider world waiting to be old” (Ballard, CN 45). Such a community, or a “private kingdom” of the future, was intentionally and carefully designed to produce a sense of timelessness. The first insight into it provides the architecture of the place, and the vast majority of its population is early retired citizenry, which indicates an even greater desire to escape the thralldom of work and sink into boredom and passivity after years of capitalist labor.

Ballard’s increasing focus on suburbia develops discontinuity of natural and social topography, leading to the loss of the inherent, intrinsic values of right and wrong. The pervasive expansion of urban space has left natural marks behind, leaving only remnants to stand out as a peculiar landmark of aestheticization. Among the palms and eucalyptus trees sheltering the comfortable villas, what dominates the vista is “the liner-like prow of the Club Nautico, topped by its white satellite dish” (Ballard, CN 14). The prevalence of concrete and metalized features generates discontinuity between the inherent interdependence of humans and nature, instilling bland emotions and a kind of social fatigue. This is mainly due to the very advanced futuristic community and the established order – the leisure society in which, among other things, boredom and drug abuse produce rather indifferent residents, and where “all this ceaseless activity, these art festivals and town councils are a form of social Parkinsonism” (Ballard, CN 138). The urban climate inflicts more Anthropocene conduct, suppressing natural entities that were highly important in the recent past; thus, the nexus of the Anthropocene era are human needs and desires. Humans have gained the ardent and selfish ambition to internalize the natural space, adjusting and configuring natural landscapes to fit their requirements, breaking the natural cycle of mutual serving and cohabiting.

In Estrella de Mar, crystal clear swimming pools, flawless tennis courts, luxurious villas, and the whole community morph into a “living organism” – to use Alaimo’s metaphor. Paradoxically, the living organism here resembles a “living death” as trance induced by antidepressants and CCTV are among the things that reanimate the community and are groomed to flourish (Borodavkin, “Book Review”). The “flourishing” occurs through murders, rapes, drugs, and setting fellow citizens’ yachts on fire for pure pleasure. The community enjoys simultaneously being a victim and transgressor, paralyzed to experience life without the thrill of vice (Borodavkin, “Book Review”).

The omnipotent effect of narcoma syndrome, the desire for early retirement, and incessant boredom have made the residents become unconcerned with common, trivial matters that once had the power to stimulate them, so they resort to something abnormal and bizarre to draw their attention and to incite social interaction, even only for the sake of staging some violent and criminal acts.

The transformation of the cities triggered the obsolescence, bringing about the reconfiguration of urban space accompanied by gentrification, which highlights the utter change in the demography of a modern metropolis. The novel introduces us to the general concept of denatured, futuristic gated communities, the Elysium, which is supposed to provide perpetual coziness and carelessness: “It’s a fortified mediaeval city. This is Goldfinger’s defensible space raised to an almost planetary intensity – security guards, tele-surveillance, no entrance except through the main gates, the whole complex closed to outsiders. It’s a grim thought, but you’re looking at the future” (Ballard, CN 210). This pertains to the immaculate condominiums that shall be all-encompassing – drug dealing, theft, pornography, and incessant leisure time – marking a new kind of renaissance and are flawless only on the surface.

The Costasol Complex is not the only residential and gated enclave in the world – this pattern of the dream world is spreading further, having replicas much greater in size. This is a carefully planned future and a development plan for the people who want to retire too soon, paying extra money to have all those facilities, but the whole complex seems abandoned as its residents are “watching TV with the sound turned down” while being “isolated in their capsules” (Ballard, CN 213). The phenomenon of social fatigue is taking its place more frequently within these denatured futuristic enclaves, as people are trying to cocoon themselves into their perfect worlds, desiring to maintain their state of not being bothered, either by social interaction or the current affairs of the outer world. In this way, they prolong the effect of inertia and lethargy of everyday life, eventually leading to brain death.

The fact that the natural space is gradually diminishing within these futuristic gated communities is because all that “space is totally internalised” (Ballard, CN 210). Humans gained more authority to take control over nature since they only needed a small particle of that external space, which would eventually be the sky over those fortified complexes through their satellite dishes. The need for a

natural environment is completely irrelevant here – the whole complex satisfies all their needs, thus leading to isolation and brain paralysis. The spatial transformation inflicts radical and innovative changes in the patterns of thinking and grasping, socializing, and living in general. In particular, when it comes to the illusionary paradise of Estrella de Mar, the perfection of this realm and the enviable energy of its inhabitants is based on the pathological and sociopath motives and behavior (Bright, “Paperback”). This is induced by the denatured landscape that dominates the coming of the new millennium, producing artificial and blasé emotions and citizenry with malevolent intentions indulged in social pathology. After years of living under a capitalist regime and incessant labor, human beings are getting more and more detached from nature; they seek utopian-like destinations, dream of early retirement, and refuse to deal with the problems of socialization. Capitalism has actually incited a new revolutionary order in the global economy and lifestyle, where technology has replaced humans in various positions, and people pursue different pastimes as their primary occupation. This economic system has also established destructive views on nature and perceives it separately, leading to the transformation of human relations. Ultimately, it has led to the age of surveillance capitalism – a digital future that could have disastrous consequences for humanity and freedom.

Yet, the morphogenesis of dystopian architecture within these urban spaces demands inhuman transformations, resulting in social and psychic entropy characterized by different forms of transgression, i.e., alienation, deviance in regular patterns of human behavior, etc., all leading to disorder in a given social structure.

Human behavior and mental state have always been conditioned and incited by states and circumstances in their individual or wider environment; hence, the urban, unconventional surroundings instigate unnatural human responses and entirely deviant behaviors, something that distances man from nature and his primordial role. This occurrence is supported by the fact that “the complex constituted a private kingdom with its own currencies of mind and meaning” (Ballard, CN 384). For instance, in these “private kingdoms,” prostitution is seen as a means of giving new meaning to the passive lives of women; the rape scene on the parking lot or recording an amateur porn film is regarded as a private thing or done for private matters. This further marks the boundaries of man’s willingness to interfere with the outer world. In addition, religion fails to

provoke collective awakening from narcoma syndrome and surges of severe violence in these denatured enclaves. As indicated in the novel, religion should appear later “when the human race begins to near its end” (Ballard, CN 239). The residents have no hope for the rebirth of the society – the only thing they have been left with is acceptance of the approaching ending. Yet, the ending does not seem promising – it would be the termination of the amnesia in which they have insulated themselves, remaining unconcerned and detached while waiting for another dose of some drug or sedative.

Ballard further strived to investigate that inner space, the landscape that reflects the incessant alienation portrayed by the Western culture of the twentieth century, continually altering the technologies of communication, production, and consumption (Lalumière, “Beyond”). Naturally, as Gasiorek argues, the extensions of capitalism have filled all the trivia of everyday life, yet more attention is turned to excessively rapid changes in a globalized economy that advanced telecommunication systems enabled (177). One of the consequences of such changes is that an individual becomes adjunct to the system in which he is imbricated, leading to the displacement of the human organism (Gasiorek 177). This is evident in the decline or complete loss of community and social values, destabilization of the human spirit and psyche, deterioration of family life, and crime rates rapidly rising.

In *Super-Cannes*, we gain insight into the slightly altered urban surroundings, as compared to *Estrella de Mar*; the metamorphosis of landscape and psyche have changed to such an extent that they match each other. The novel is set in a zero-waste landscape, which embodies an illusory realm of perfection and an ultramodern workers’ paradise. It is a high-tech business park with the technocrats at top offices as “the key psychological zone” (Ballard, SC 18). It is also a “huge experiment in how to hothouse the future” (Ballard, SC 17). In this business hub, corporate managers enhance their productivity with fun, yet they cannot fully relax outside their workplaces since capitalism left indelible marks for years to come.

In *Eden-Olympia*, greater divisions within the human race are visible, which can be supported by the pervasive and expansive desire in this urban space to purify the place of all imperfections and “human waste.” The violence and subordination of certain races brought to existence the environmental justice movements that emerged from certain racial inequities and the belief that the

connection between people and their environment may challenge environmental health concerns. The business operations at this location rely on the exploitation of immigrants in the nearby town of Cannes La Bocca. To avoid potential depression, the executives resort to abusing the immigrants as a form of stress relief. As one character explains, “Whenever he felt the blues coming on he would take one of the security men into La Bocca and provoke an incident with a passing immigrant. It worked a treat” (Ballard, SC 191). This abusive behavior towards immigrants also serves as an executive therapy, with the character noting, “Close colleagues... too cheered up. I asked if I could keep a professional eye on the exercise. Soon we had an active therapy group with a dozen senior executives” (Ballard, SC 191). Trashing Arab cars, beating Russian pimps, violent attacks, and rapes of immigrant women turned into a “kind of weekend fascism” (Ballard, SC 281) as they provided certain health benefits for the executives drained by the work.

Within this denatured enclave, nature is relegated to a secondary role, valued primarily for its capacity to create a sense of purity and order. However, ecocollapse manifests itself in various forms, including the camouflaging of the landscape. Artificial lakes, expansive car parks, and aqua-parks take precedence over natural features. This corporate haven is designed to transform “Provence into Europe’s Silicon Valley” (Ballard, SC 10), dominated by glass and metal office blocks separated by artificial lakes and “forested traffic islands” that offer only a token nod to nature’s existence. These gated resorts are founded on the premise of providing refuge from the outside world, yet they hide their true nature behind various facades. For example, psychotherapy is used to justify the molestation of immigrants, while glimpses of nature are aesthetically disguised with artificial substitutes. The residents’ obsession with perfection and their desire to conceal the rawness of nature results in the transformation of the earthscape. Expensive materials such as milled ivory are used to create more refined surfaces, intended to “soothe the stressed wheels of the stretch limousines” (Ballard, SC 12).

Canary palms serve their purpose in these office blocks merely as a palisade and “guard along the verges” and cannas only as a gaudy representation and reception to the business park. Most of the business park is man-made in order to cleanse the place of all waste, human and natural. This is indicative of the fact that humans are striving to gain even greater power over nature. They aspire

to leave none of the leverage to nature, and they aim to force the ecosphere to adjust to their lifestyle and not vice versa.

The rest of the Eden-Olympia “displayed old-money discretion,” being only the mirage of the biosphere. Even the residents’ romantic relationships appear to be against nature and natural processes: “I’m a devoted husband. That must strike you as totally deviant.”/ “No. Just a little against nature” (Ballard, SC 83). The response suggests that the idea of being a devoted husband is not entirely in line with the natural order of things, implying that there may be something artificial or contrived about the romantic relationships in the community. Such attitude toward marriage, and relationships in general, indicates that the dwellers of the business park ingrained a strain of deviousness, the bizarre mood that revolves around the need to play on masochistic terrain. It points to the artificiality of the society created in Eden-Olympia, where even the natural order of romantic relationships has been distorted by technology and the pursuit of wealth and leisure. Moreover, it implies that, in this millennium, one does not long for the enemy, but to become the victim, denoting a shift in human mental state or disorder that is adopted as one of the weird surges of culture.

This may indicate that nature, be it in physical or abstract form, is losing its supremacy and precedence. However, nothing is as it first seems here, as “over the swimming pools and manicured lawns seemed to hover a dream of violence” (Ballard, SC 64). The residents claim that there is almost no crime here as abusive activities and violence – along with other perverted “ventures” – serve as psychotherapy. Since their desire for innovative approaches to entertainment is insatiable, the residents are in danger of losing their sense of limits and exhausting all the options and possibilities. The residents gradually become acclimated to the corporate environment, and this is reflected in their personal relationships, which have transformed into, as Gasiorek argues, “contractual liaisons between objects” (177).

Given the above, it is plausible that urban areas are prone to violence and can alter nature, leading to human brutality and atrocities. Man’s alienation from nature merged with technological advances and spatial transformations, has given man immense power and control over nature. However, in the process, humans have forgotten how to coexist and rely on nature, as they did in the past, to sustain human life and natural resources. Everything in nature is interconnected, so humans’

striving to dominate the landscape is questionable. By neglecting to recognize and reassess the relationship between the human body and the environment, humans violate the natural course of evolution.

Eden-Olympia, like Estrella de Mar, is shrouded in a haze of violence and voyeurism due to the corporate order that governs it. Clinics prescribe powerful tranquilizers for those who refuse to deal with mental crises or stressful situations, inducing the narcoma syndrome that deters residents from movement and leads them into idleness and emotional numbness. To dispel the illusion of love, residents cherish their marriages by watching their partners' infidelities and getting excited just by looking at it, or by watching "kiddie porn," or even having intercourse with thirteen-year-olds. Shockingly, these activities are not even regarded as serious crimes. In this sense, the novel suggests that the human realm of intimacy and relationships has undergone the same transformation as natural and urban landscapes. Similar to Cocaine Nights, the residents of Eden-Olympia are consumed by work and lack moral and spiritual values, unable to conceive of a life beyond their workplace. In this consumerist society, consumer capitalism is the real crime, erasing morality and even commodifying the human soul. The existence of bizarre and perverse consumer trends also gives rise to unsettling entertainment.

Conclusively, as McFarland attests, various nuances of ecocollapse here threaten the dominion of the human subject, creating a post-apocalyptic scenario that may lead to human extinction rather than a rebirth of the same society. Within the framework of an ecocollapsed future that presents denatured ecosystems, as evident in Estrella de Mar and Eden-Olympia, human subjects whose bodies are embedded in the larger environment must reconsider their identities and recognize that everything outside is already within, as Alaimo advocates. This implies that humans are inseparable from nature and that any opposing approach can only lead to ecocollapse. The Anthropocene era offers a plethora of devastated personal (human) landscapes damaged by the belief in human exceptionalism. Ecocollapse destabilizes the world and renders it uninhabitable to humans, challenging the potency of human superiority and exceptionalism.

In Cocaine Nights and Super-Cannes, the city symbolically represents a place where one is likely to succumb to dehumanizing forces that exist in urban settings. The characters easily adopt an urban consciousness and behave accordingly. The sterility of urban life is reflected in the

ultramodern, zero-waste buildings, whose residents are unable to live creatively as part of the flow of time and nature due to their alienation from nature and their daily subjection to the mechanics of civilization. The scarcity of natural spaces creates a Ballardian landscape of sociopathic violence, transgression, and pornography networks, reflecting the social entropy that characterizes modern-day society and the damage done to human relationships. In these futuristic gated communities, whose residents are obsessed with security, they defend and protect their territory from any potential threats from the outside world. As a result, the ecosystem is dying. There exists a stark contrast between the closed-off enclaves and the external world, which is open to all. These enclaves are like fortresses, providing their residents with all their daily needs and rendering them secure enough to exclude themselves from the outside world. While this may reduce everyday stress prevalent in modern metropolises, such as commuting or traveling to procure necessary items, it fosters social exclusion and has a negative impact on social capital. Moreover, it often instills a false sense of security, amplifying paranoia and increasing isolation. In contrast, the external world does not offer the same level of security and amenities but still maintains a certain level of socialization, though gentrification is gradually leading to an increase in gated residential communities.

This is due to limiting its territory to the defensible internal space in which human life and body are “a programmed code” that cannot operate outside of structured activities and cannot act spontaneously, as Gasiorek argues (166). The aftermath of the city’s implosion into the natural environment shifts the focus from the correlation between humans and nature to the interface between humans and machines (technology), in which machines become “anthropomorphized” (Gasiorek 207), and humans mechanized. This, in turn, shows how environmental problems breed various human problems, resulting in hindsight of complete detachment stemming from the colonization of natural space. Alternatively, this implies that places (nature) are never just background, as Alaimo contends, as they are intimately connected to humans with their own beings and needs, not existing solely as human resources.

Living in high-tech, urban settings means “mechanizing” their residents and conditioning their mindset by “nourishing” their physical and mental health so that it “matches” their surroundings. Humans are treated and perceived in a mechanized manner, which “casts the body as passive,

plastic matter” (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 3). Humans are determined to obsessively repulse nature, completely oblivious to the fact that “the environment is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves,” as Alaimo suggests (*Bodily Natures* 4). Ballard’s “terminal Edens” are only a simulacrum of perfection and non-presence of nature, as it would not be viable “to protect ‘nature’ by merely creating separate, distinct areas in which it is ‘preserved’” and “protected” from the rest of the world (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 18).

Under the pressures of mechanization, man fails to properly understand the bond between humans and the more-than-human world, and acknowledge the fact that the environment is, in Alaimo’s words, a human landscape “in which people blend into their living spaces” (*Bodily Natures*, 122). In addition, these circumstances contribute to creating an atmosphere of environmental illness, where an individual’s humanity, as they are part of nature, is constantly threatened to be violated. In other words, one’s health, the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being – along with environmental health – are very likely to become ultimately damaged.

The violence within urban settings that results from environmental illness, symbolically embodied in one’s spiritual, emotional, and mental paralysis, appears to be just as devastating as the effects of natural disasters on both rural and urban settings. The social, psychological, and psychic entropy within urban settings is as dreadful as the physical entropy that strikes the planet in the form of a natural catastrophe. In such a world, humans cannot retrieve or reclaim their natural aspects, as they are violated and diminished by the advanced mechanization of daily life. Deviant behavior and bizarre pursuits in these Anthropocene enclaves (denatured ecosystems) cannot renew and revive the life and atmosphere of the communities; rather, they can only incite the threat of “extinction as an end point,” as McFarland suggests (8).

The constant opposition between the city and nature in Ballard’s fiction is not a simplistic matter of good and evil or positive and negative. Nor is the opposition of urban/rural codes expressed solely through the emphasis on the opposition between the masculine and feminine, with the masculine representing the city and civilization and the feminine representing the natural world. By stressing the adverse effects of natural disasters on both natural and urban habitats in his cli-fi novels, as well as the “civilizing” process of natural landscapes by human activities in his urban disaster and urban violence novels, Ballard seems to suggest that human beings need to adopt a holistic vision

of humans within the environment. This vision relies on our perception of human bodies as trans-corporeal spaces inseparable from the environment and the recognition that “human health is undeniably affected by the health of the environment” (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 92). The quest for such a vision is likely to transform the opposed urban/rural codes into a new system of dynamic interrelatedness that requires more sensitive approaches to the symbiosis of the human and nonhuman world.

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[1] Fourth-wave ecocriticism is a relatively new approach to literary and cultural studies that focuses on environmental issues and sustainability. It builds upon earlier waves of ecocriticism but expands the scope of analysis to include a broader range of cultural texts and modes of analysis. It emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, drawing on insights from fields such as environmental science, economics, philosophy, and cultural studies.

[2] J. G. Ballard's urban violence quadrilogy comprises four novels, *Cocaine Nights* (1996), *Super-Cannes* (2000), *Millennium People* (2003), and *Kingdom Come* (2006).



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