COMMUNITY PURIFIED BY COM-MUTINY: REMAPPING THE PATH TO DYSTOPIA IN J.G. BALLARD'S *HIGH-RISE*[1]

ORTAK İSYANLA ARINAN CEMAAT: J. G. BALLARD'IN HIGH-RISE ROMANINDA DİSTOPYAYA GİDEN YOLU YENİDEN ÇİZMEK

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Abstract

This paper aims to map the path leading to violence in J. G. Ballard's High-Rise. Being a science fiction and dystopian fiction which locates these elements, not in the future and somewhere else, but here and now, the novel defamiliarizes the reader from his/her built environment. With a homogenous community at its center, the novel problematizes the urban discourses that culminate in spatial segregation of the cities. Due to the transgressive nature of the novel between fiction and reality, as London is the location of the novel, this paper will shortly deal with the blurring boundaries between the literature and the spatial humanities, and those between utopia and dystopia. Secondly, the negative outcomes of the homogeneity in social relations will be identified in the novel by using Richard Sennett's urbanism as a theoretical framework. Thirdly, the role of the affluence in the disintegration of the supposedly safe community will be revealed with an emphasis on the phenomenon of boredom and lack of cooperation. In this way, the paper will seek to contribute to Ballardian studies, using the cautionary aspect of the dystopia that unearths the latent possibilities buried in the quotidian environment.

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı J. G. Ballard'ın High-Rise adlı romanında şiddete giden yolu belirlemektir. Bilim ve distopya unsurlarını geleceğe ve başka bir yere değil de buraya ve şimdiye yerleştiren bir roman olarak High-Rise, okuru kendi inşa edilmiş çevresinden yabancılaştırır. Odak noktasında homojen bir topluluk/cemaat bulunan roman kentlerin mekânsal olarak ayrışmasına neden olan kentsel söylemleri sorgular. Romanın yerinin Londra olması nedeniyle kurmaca ve gerçeklik arasındaki geçişkenlikten dolayı bu çalışma ilk olarak edebiyat ve mekânsal beşeri bilimler arasında yok olan sınırları ve sonrasında da ütopya ve distopya arasında yok olan sınırları kısaca tartışacaktır. İkinci olarak, Richard Sennett'in kent anlayışı kuramsal bir çerçeve olarak kullanılarak toplumsal ilişkilerde homojenliğin romanda yol açtığı olumsuz neticeler belirlenecektir. Üçüncü olarak ise, can sıkıntısı olgusuna ve işbirliği yetersizliğine vurgu yapılarak güvenli olduğu farz edilen topluluğun dağılmasında ekonomik refahın rolü ortaya koyulacaktır. Bu şekilde, okurun gündelik çevresinde gizli ihtimalleri ortaya çıkaran distopyanın uyarıcı yönü kullanılarak Ballard çalışmalarına katkıda bulunulması amaçlanmaktadır.

Introduction: The Shifting Boundaries of Utopian Imagination and Dystopian Reality

The participants of the Bastille Day military parade in Paris in July 2019 witnessed a hitherto unprecedented scene. Franky Zapata, with his jet-powered fly board hovering over the conventional French troops, became the focus of attraction, displaying a futuristic scene reminiscent of science fiction movies. It has also been announced that the French Ministry of Defense would hire a team of science fiction writers, the "red team", to anticipate the future threats to the national security which

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[1] This article has been extracted from the author's Ph.D. dissertation entitled "The Representation of Urban Space in J. G. Ballard's Novels" submitted to Ankara University's Graduate School of Social Sciences in December 2018.

the military authorities may not predict. This anecdote is just one of the myriads of examples in which fiction breaks away from its ontological boundaries. Architecture or wider urban planning occupies no exceptional position in the shifting boundaries between fiction and reality, the reciprocity that ignites the interest of this paper. The resurgence of interest in the interrelatedness of these cultural forms finds a firm foothold with the publication of *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* by Bertrand Westphal in 2007. Informed by postmodernism which has a penchant for violating ontological boundaries, he notes that *"[l]iterature is not a subordinate field, operating in the service of other humanities and social sciences, but literature can certainly help them in their projects"* (Westphal 103). Especially, those works of literature which have actual geographical references provide the geographers, urban planners or architects with a plethora of materials which unveil *"new virtualities hitherto unexpressed, which then interact with the real according to the hypertextual logic of interfaces"* (Westphal 103). Despite certain methodological differences from Westphal, geocriticism, as understood by Robert T. Tally, Jr., undermines the hierarchical relations between fiction and geography. By what he calls *literary cartography*, Tally contends that an author is essentially a cartographer in that *"narrative [...] is a form of world-making as much as it is a mode of world presenting, which in the end may come up to the same thing"* (Tally 49). Hence, it may be argued that geocritical venture to erase the boundaries between spatial social sciences and literature equates the role of the author to that of an architect or planner.

Therefore, geocritically speaking, Ballard can be read both as an architect/planner and as an author. An architectural critic goes so far as to say that *"[w]e have more to learn from the fiction of J. G. Ballard [...] than we do from Le Corbusier"* in BLDGBLOG to appreciate Ballard's anticipatory skills regarding the trends that may shape the urban space (Manaugh). Published in 1975, J. G. Ballard's *High-Rise* is a dystopian novel which reflects the socio-spatial trends of its period through a distorting mirror. The novel relates the story of a gated-community resided by the middle and upper-middle-class individuals who descend into barbarism for no discernible reason. Though Ballard snapshots a scene from the 1970s, the kind of community he delineates in *High-Rise* has cast a long shadow on the urban planning of the subsequent decades. The rising number of these social formations in the 21st century testifies to the topicality of the spatial form with which Ballard deals. Blakely and Snyder outline a typology of these communities as lifestyle, prestige and security, though they may also complement each other in any given gated-community (57-58). Despite the differences in their typologies, several works have indicated that these

social formations are results of an urban fear or fear of crime (Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* 94; Blakely and Snyder 57; Caldeira 254; Lemanski 290; Low 262; Zukin 2). However, *High-Rise* challenges the taken for granted assumptions of the residents of the gated communities regarding safety and crime by locating the violence in the center of the community. This paper argues that homogeneity, affluence and search for order are the very reasons contributing to the dystopic atmosphere depicted in the novel. It will try to map the path leading to dystopia by using Richard Sennett's urbanism as a projection.

The novel has received much acclaim from the critics and proved to be rich material for criticism from various points of view. Criticism on Ballard's fiction broadly falls into two categories, which also shows the sources of Ballardian fiction. One strain of criticism evaluates his works from a psychological and psychiatric perspective. Bradshaw and Brown's study (2018) can be listed under this category, for, drawing from R. D. Laing, and also Lauren Berlant, they argue that the novel is not a dystopia but an account of reaching a better society. In a similar vein, Oramus (2007) reads the novel from a Jungian perspective and states that the novel eventually manifests an ironic utopia through a delineation of a *"regress to the state of social animals cherishing violence and wayward sexuality"* (110). She argues that the novel shows an attempt to reach the Jungian ideal of complete Self. The second vein of criticism deals with the sociological aspect of the novel, putting a special emphasis on the urban transformations and their social results. Within this framework, Hewitt and Graham's study (2014) delves into the social connotations of verticality of the high-rise and shows the contribution of verticality to the sense of power felt by the characters. Hatherley (2016) explores the historicity of the text as well as its film adaptation by juxtaposing urban discourses and practices of the 1970s and those represented in the novel. David Ian Paddy (2015) explores the ways by which the novel is informed by the colonial and postcolonial discourses in a period when immigration into the UK gained pace. Zang et al. (2008) explain the reason of the dystopic outcome in the novel as the clash of, in Lefebvre's terms, spatial practices and representations of space. This study can be considered to be in the second vein of criticism, though the psychological reasons and results of the social shifts are also included to further substantiate the main argument. Of the studies listed above, Zang et al.'s analysis is closest to this paper in that it aims to unearth the reason of the dystopic outcome; however, what is novel in this study is that the function of social homogeneity and affluence is examined to demonstrate the reason of violence in the novel.

Richard Sennett's urbanism, which constitutes the main theoretical framework of this study, draws from a wide array of disciplines including sociology, psychology, fashion, history, and architecture. What makes Sennett's approach to the purified communities so invaluable in this study is its understanding of social heterogeneities and disorder as maturing and civilizing agents for the individuals. His *The Uses of Disorder* (1970), written in the same decade as *High-Rise*, warns the reader of the oversimplification of the social sphere as a result of spatial homogenization and spatially escapist orientations observed especially among the affluent milieu of the Western societies. The work is based on an extended metaphor between adolescent behavior and the members of affluent homogeneous communities. According to Sennett, adolescence is a period when an individual takes lifelong decisions and *"assumes the lessons of experience without undergoing the actual experience itself"* (*The Uses of Disorder...* 20). Extending this approach to the members of the purified communities, he proposes that the supposedly homogeneous communities suffer from illusions of coherence whereas they are polarized due to their lack of common experiential frame in reality. In this regard, Sennett's interpretation of the purified communities resembles Benedict Anderson's assessment of the nations as being imagined entities in that both emphasize the imagined unity of discrete personalities and exclusivity of the communal body (6-7). However, unlike Anderson, Sennett believes that this false image of the self is exactly what jeopardizes the coherence among the community members, which renders the given social body stillborn or ready to disintegrate when an internal issue that compels the members to negotiate the differences among themselves. When the homogeneous order becomes the defining characteristic of a community, claims Sennett, *"the escalation of discord into violence comes to be [...] the means by which 'law and order' should be maintained"* (*The Uses of Disorder* 45). The process can be better understood by what he calls "destructive *Gemeinschaft*" in *The Fall of Public Man* which differs from *The Uses of Disorder* in that the latter is an ahistorical account of homogeneous communities. In this work, he relates the rise and demise of public space with references to material social life and psychology beginning from the 18th century down to the late 20th century. "The city," says Sennett *"is that human settlement in which strangers are most likely to meet"* (*The Fall of Public Man* 264). This obvious explanation has, in fact, quite subtle ramifications in terms of the nascent communities within the urban space inasmuch as Sennett thinks that it is the anonymity of the urban public space that is the essence of civility, a word which has a common etymology with "city". However, a culture of intimacy coupled with

narcissism violates the boundary between public and private:

> The reigning belief today is that closeness between persons is a moral good. The reigning aspiration today is to develop individual personality through experiences of closeness and warmth with others. The reigning myth today is that the evils of society can all be understood as evils of impersonality, alienation and coldness. (Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* 67).

The reaction to the impersonality of the public space is a pursuit of an environment where one seeks a collective image of the self, in other words, *Gemeinschaft.* What makes these communities "destructive" is their obsession with the identities, which has two immediate outcomes. Firstly, in these communities, *"the shared imagery becomes deterrent to shared action"* (Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* 223). Since these communities take the social coherence for granted due to their collective identity, the need to act becomes meaningless for their members. Secondly, these communities, which seem to be the bodies of fraternity, paradoxically paves way for the fratricide in that the question of authentic belonging to the fraternity is never settled, leading a process of everlasting internal exclusion.

As to the 20th century, Sennett argues that *"one of the unintended consequences of modern capitalism is that it has strengthened the value of place, aroused a longing for community"* (*The Corrosion...* 138). However, the utopian characteristic of these attempts per se is what makes them problematic, which, more often than not, has put their desirability into question and even has blurred the boundaries separating the utopia and the dystopia. Karl Popper highlights the side effects of utopianism, considering that although it is based on rationalism, its rationalism is *"self-defeating and it leads to violence"* (5). In a way that can be comparable to Popper, J. G. Ballard, in an interview with H. U. Obrist in 2003, dismisses any utopian hope, referring to Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia as the epitomes of utopia which transformed into dystopia ("Nothing is real, everything is fake" 393). Similarly, Northrop Frye illustrates an imaginary dialogue between a reader and a utopia-writer where the former repudiates the utopia due to its restrictive quality and the latter makes an apology of the utopia, stating that *"What you mean is that you don't want your present ritual habits disturbed. My utopia would feel different from inside, where the ritual habits would be customary and so carry with them a sense of freedom rather than constraint"* (329). This dialogue is essentially precipitated by the discrepancy between fictitious unquestionability of a fictitious community and the inability of the real reader to integrate himself/herself to a

framework produced by the utopian writer. However, although this dialogue is based on the reader's interaction with the fiction, the 20th century witnessed a boom in the number of gated-communities which promised to present a better life or a lost paradise to their customers. A toponymical investigation on the gated-communities in South Africa reveals that 48,5% of the names of these communities have connotations of environment, peacefulness, other-worldliness and rusticity (Spocter 335). Though located within the cities or near the cities these social formations have had only tentative ties with the cities due to a perceived danger associated with the public spaces of the cities. While walling historically served to the protection of the cities as a whole, *"the walls […] now crisscross the city itself, and in a multitude of directions"* (Bauman, *Globalization: Human Consequences* 48). However, whether the issue of security is fully achieved within these communities continues to be a topic of discussion. For instance, Addington and Rennison report that although the gated communities may diminish the incidence of burglaries, they may also provide with an environment where the *"victim is 'locked in' with the offender"* (187). Simon warns that the excessive levels of perceived danger and the resultantly built over-controlled environments may actually provoke the people to disturb the public order (203). In much the same vein as Simon, but years before him, J. G. Ballard alerts that:

> [In the suburbs] the only freedom to be found is in *madness.* I mean, in a completely sane world, *madness* is the only freedom! That's what's coming. That's why suburbs interest me. […] Where one's almost got to get up in the morning and make a *resolution* to perform some sort of deviant or antisocial act, some perverse act, even if it's sort of *kicking the dog,* in order to establish one's own freedom. Suburbs are very sinister places, contrary to what most people imagine. ("An Interview with JGB" 154).

Towards a Purified Community

The quote above reveals much about Ballard's authorship. His fiction's distinctive characteristic is its ability to looking the quotidian scenes through a dystopifying mirror. His authorship resembles the work of a jigsaw puzzle producer: He prints an ordinary scene from the reader's environment; cuts the pieces in such a way that he can reconstruct pieces together in a completely different way, without any mismatch, to exhibit a dystopic alternative of the original scene. Therefore, Ballard's novels concretize what Bertrand Westphal claims as literature's potentiality to expose the possibilities buried in the reader's environment. Being one of the epitomes of Ballardian fiction, *High-Rise* does not deal with an architectural form in

a distant future but with the possible social consequences of a building enabled by the then-current science and technology. For this reason, though there is not a specific date in which the novel is set, the technology represented in the novel strongly implies that it takes place during the 1970s. Historically, the publication of the novel coincides with the rapid transformations taking place in the urban fabric and the skyline of London. The historian Roy Porter assesses that in London *"[t]he high-rise heyday between 1964 and 1974 saw 384 tower blocks being built"* (353). However, when these high-rises were built, they were not designed to cater to the needs of the middle or the upper-middle classes as in Ballard's novel. Referring to one of those buildings, Owen Hatherley indicates that *"when Ballard wrote the novel, it would have been hard to imagine any of his cast of solicitors, architects, doctors, dentists, documentary filmmakers and pilots walking anywhere near Balfron Tower, let alone living in it"* (71). This may give the reader a clue of why the novel can be classified as "science fiction". Suvin (2016) defines this genre as one that uses the technique of "cognitive estrangement", a term that means the use of a 'novum', something alien to the reader's empirical environment yet not completely illogical or against the laws of nature. If it had not been for the technology that enabled the construction of a tower building, installation of elevators, pools and other facilities that keep the residents inside the building, the distinctive environment that unfolds the violent events in the novel would not have been possible. The building itself is a 'novum' in that the upper middle class luxury residences were not introduced to London then. However, as it is highlighted above, Ballard is known for his mastery for analyzing the trajectories shaping the web of social relations under the influence of the technology of his own day. Accordingly, not long after the publication of the novel, was London introduced with high-rises that appealed to the rich white-collar professionals, one of them being Cascades designed by CZWG architects and, curiously, built on the Isle of Dogs where Ballard's fictional tower is located.

High-Rise questions the spatially secessionist tendencies of the affluent milieu who regard the public space of the city as a source of danger or negligible space rather than as somewhere they can acquire experience to mature. The meaning attached to the building by the residents has utopian connotations as it can be understood from Wilder who calls it "our hanging paradise" (Ballard, *High-Rise* 15). This characteristic of the building, which also implies the detachment of it from the rest of the city, is largely ensured through the homogeneous constitution of the community:

> The two thousand tenants formed a virtually homogeneous collection of well-to-do professional people [...] By the usual financial and educational yardsticks they were probably closer to each other than the members of any conceivable social mix [...] In short, they constituted a perfect background into which Laing could merge invisibly. (Ballard, *High-Rise* 6).

The narrator focuses on three characters in the building. One of them is Richard Wilder, a television producer who resides on the second floor with his wife and children. He plans to shoot a documentary concerning the psychology of living in the high-rise building. The other pivotal character is Anthony Royal, the architect of the building who lives on the top floor with his wife, Anne. Though he plans to live there temporarily at the beginning, he gradually grows fond of the nascent violence in the building and lives in his penthouse like a clan leader until his murder by Wilder. The other main character is Robert Laing, a physician who lives on the 25th floor. He is notable for his reserved and indifferent demeanor and of the three focal characters Laing is the one who survives at the end. Laing has a distinctive function in the novel in that the narrator discloses the motivations of a typical high-rise dweller for living there mainly in the chapters focusing on Laing. Through his move to high-rise, Laing bypasses any kind of confrontation with the differences in the city by further confining the limits of his, to borrow Lefebvre's term, "spatial practices": *"when he sold the lease of his Chelsea house and moved to the security of the high-rise, he travelled [...] away from crowded streets, traffic holds-ups, rush-hour journeys on the Underground"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 4). However, his attitude to the heterogeneous constitution of the city becomes a basic blueprint by which he organizes all his future relations in the building. At the beginning of the novel, he has a certain level of mutual respect and understanding with his neighbors. However, this environment is a rather forced one than one which he and his neighbors construct. The social bonds he forges are continually put to question through his withdrawn attitude. Although he seems to be on good terms with Charlotte Melville, his immediate neighbor, and Wilder who lives on the second floor, his relations with them can be defined by a level of distance that prevents him from any kind of cooperation or affection. Being an attractive widow, Charlotte attracts Laing's attention, but, as in many other topics, Laing evaluates his relationship with her with a pinch of salt, and even suspects that she aims to use him for her interests like taking care of her child when she is at work. It would be ironical, or even contradictory, for him not to have these suspicions, for his initial move into high-rise is, in fact, a move behind his threshold. One of the

early dialogues he held with Charlotte Melville, who shares her grievances over the exclusion of the children from the swimming pool, reveals his mental attitude about the world outside his own threshold:

> "The terms of our leases guarantee us equal access to all facilities," Charlotte explained. "We have decided to set up a parents' action group." "Doesn't that leave me out?", [says Laing]. "We need a doctor on the committee. The pediatric argument would come much more forcefully from you, Robert." "Well, perhaps..." Laing hesitated to commit himself. (Ballard, *High-Rise* 16).

Laing's equivocation in this scene is largely an outcome of narcissistic disorder in which, as Richard Sennett claims, one is preoccupied *with "what this person, that event means to me"* (*The Fall of Public Man* 8). The intrusion of reality into Laing's illusions of self-sufficiency and completeness serves as a source of irritation and anxiety. The same illusions can be observed in Laing's notion of the high-rise as a utopian enclave where social rapprochement is taken for granted by means of the supposed homogeneity of the residents as well as the functional architecture of the building. According to this conviction, the high-rise is thought to be a building where one is not supposed to confront any discord, let alone bother to settle it. This is the very reason why Laing keeps constantly being "surprised" (Ballard, *High-Rise* 8, 20, 25, 28) as the bickering in the building unfolds into fiercer clashes. The first chapters of the novel portray an environment in which a forced peace gradually leads to the disintegration of social order. The first chapter informs the reader that the last flat in the building is occupied and the residents celebrate this with parties. However, it should also be noted that the name of the first chapter is "Critical Mass", a term that refers to, amongst others, the necessary amount of material that can start the reaction in nuclear weapons. This reference is significant because it implies that peace is an illusion in the community and the residents are prone to 'explode'.

The above-given dialogue between Laing and Melville unearths not only Laing's social shortcomings but those of Melville, as well. Her call for help from Laing, not as a neighbor but as a doctor, testifies to her inability to navigate herself, without professional assistance, on slightly challenging terrain. Her predicament can be considered to be a result of what Jürgen Habermas would have called "technicization of the lifeworld" or "colonization of the lifeworld" in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, for she lets a purely rationalist mechanism replace her social agency. Furthermore, her residence in a building that fosters the ideals of functionalism is reflective of her lacking social competences. Just as she needs a pediatric argument

for her right by contract, she needs the technical knowledge of Anthony Royal, the architect of the building, who promises a purified community as well as a functional building, to avoid any friction in her social relations. The residents rely so much on the technical knowledge of Royal that he becomes a god-like figure who dwells on a place that *"had somehow preserved him from the ordinary process of aging"* (*High-Rise* 31). Drawing from the studies of the psychologists, Sennett identifies three patterns of avoidance assumed by the adolescents whom he equates with the seekers of purity in the urban space. These patterns can be observed in the novel. These may be summarized as resorting to a higher authority in one's desire to control in order not to confront surprises, the denial of regret in favor of previously made decisions and the search for ideal partner reflecting one's own image rather than a distinct personality (*The Uses of Disorder* 14-15). The first of these patterns explains Melville's attitude which, in Sennett's terms, freezes the personality in adolescence and inhibits the intrusion of new experiences in one's life. When the authority or bureaucratic power ceases to exist, she and the other residents of the building are unable to cope with the problems they face. For instance, the solution of the problems in the building is left to a manager's office acting as a third party whose closure would later serve to exacerbation of the hostilities among the residents. Suffering from "moral minimalism", as M.P. Baumgartner calls it, they are not equipped with enough social competences that will prevent the disputes from transforming into physical violence.

The second pattern can be observed in the adherence of the residents to the high-rise even as the trivial disputes in the building culminate into fierce hostilities, including murder, vandalism, and rape. Despite the severity of the atrocities everyone inflicts upon each other, none of the residents are neither inclined to move out of the building nor to inform legal authorities to call for an intervention. The building itself becomes the only city where they can maintain a rigid group identity. The narrator's depiction of the high-rise as a "vertical city" (Ballard*, High-Rise* 4) further testifies to the removal of London from the mental maps of the residents. As the hostilities escalate, Helen Wilder, one of the lower floor residents, asks her husband, Richard Wilder, if they should sell the apartment (Ballard *High-Rise* 60), which strikes as the first sensible commentary after so much violence. However, the narrator immediately mortifies this assumption:

> Helen, of course, was thinking in terms of social advancement, of moving in effect to a 'better neighborhood', away from this lower-class suburb to those smarter residential districts somewhere between 15th and 30th floors, where the corridors were clean and the children would

> not have to play in the streets, where tolerance and sophistication
> civilized the air. (Ballard *High-Rise* 60-61).

Although Richard understands her proposal in a literal sense, he refuses to leave the building, musing that this decision would be a *"failure to deal on equal terms with his professional neighbours"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 60). Thus, adopting one of the patterns of avoidance, Richard opts for his initial decision to be a part of the community at the expense of becoming a savage towards the end of the novel.

The last pattern of avoidance, seeking one's own image in one's relationships, is inscribed in the homogeneous structure of the building and is closely associated with what Sennett describes as destructive *Gemeinschaft.* The sociological account of Georg Simmel whose point of view is shared by Sennett as to the matter of conflict is highly elucidative in understanding the constructive function of conflict. Simmel claims *that "people who have many common features often do one another worse or "worser" wrong than complete strangers do [...] We confront the stranger with whom we share neither characteristics nor broader interests, objectively; we hold our personalities in reserve"* (*Conflict* 44; also see Coser 68). The characters think that they enter into an impersonal realm when they enter the building, much to their relief; but they are wrong. The impersonality is left behind in the city which they have deserted. The realm they have entered is somewhere they seek to find those people similar to themselves. The novel undermines the assumption that any conflict arising from differences is likely to lead to violence and emphasizes that sameness in the communities is not a state of *being* but an endless process of *becoming* whereby the shunning of the "unlike me" continues until the depletion of all social ties. This orientation may also be explained by the term "narcissism of minor differences" that Freud uses to designate the conflicts between the *"communities with adjoining territories, and related to each other"* (72). Although Freud downplays the possible catastrophic results of this phenomenon, considering that it provides with a *"harmless satisfaction of the inclination to aggression, by means of which cohesion between the members of the community is made easier"* (72), the novel reveals the violence-prone aspect of the sameness. Since homogeneity becomes the lens through which the residents scrutinize the world, any minor difference comes to be viewed through a magnifying glass. For instance, despite the supposed homogeneity of the building, the residents expeditiously label each other as those with children and those with pets and interpersonal relations begin to be organized according to this principle. This is also the reason why the culprit of the infrastructural deficiencies is not deemed Royal, the architect of the building, but the other residents, having minor

differences than the self. Consequently, for instance, despite the ethnical purity of the community, a new racist discourse is directed against the other neighbors by Steele who is Laing's next-door neighbour. Steele, like many other residents of the building, watches for opportunities to vilify the neighbors living on the lower floors. When he expresses his grievances over the misuse of the electrical infrastructure by the lower floor residents, Steele assumes such a hateful mode of speech that Laing considers he was talking *"as if he were describing a traditionally feckless band of migrant workers rather than his well-to-do neighbours"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 28). Although Laing's lifestyle seems to be a source of irritation for the Steeles at the outset, due to the identifications forged with floor height they eventually welcome Laing and exclude the other residents. On the one hand, Laing's observation testifies to the overall racist discourse that settled in Great Britain especially during the 1960s with the arrival of Commonwealth immigrants, which is one of the *raison d'etre* of the purified community; on the other hand, Steele's repugnance indicates that a community construction which excludes "misfits" ironically produces new "misfits" to be shunned. Since the kind of community in *High-Rise* is essentially a destructive *Gemeinschaft* that is intimately related to the narcissistic obsession, not the collective experiences, the infrastructural deficiencies which are apparently the source of irritations are forgotten during the course of the novel and the violence among them becomes one without reason.

This obsession with identity is also the reason why any reader of *High Rise* is likely to fail to give a detailed plot summary of the novel. Any attempt to do it usually ends up with the description of the building and the nascent barbarism in a modernist tower block. Ballard's own interferences into the narrative to do commentaries through certain characters or the narrator play a role in this problem, which, at the same time, confirms David Ian Paddy's observation that Ballard's oeuvre can be classified as "novels of ideas" (2). However, particularly in the case of *High-Rise,* the absence of any shared experience needed to build a sustainable community is what eventually leads to the reader's inability to summarize a proper plotline. The experiential frame that will enable the formation of social history is simply missing in *High-Rise.* Both the motivations of the characters for moving into the building and the functionality of the building that minimizes human agency prevent the 'fermentation' of a civilized environment and leave the residents unguarded against their own impulses.

The vertical organization of space further consolidates the narcissism based on minor differences, though it cannot be considered the sole reason for the breakdown of the social structure. As to the social connotations of the verticality in the novel, Hewitt and Graham underline that *"[it] highlights and concretises inequities"* (929). Although the residents are completely white-collar members of the society, the building has its own *"'proletariat' of film technicians, air-hostesses and the like"* (Ballard *High-Rise* 69- 70). The residents' continual identification with the floors or the narrator's identification of the residents with the floors on which they live is a result of a strong sense of hierarchical order needed to identify and negotiate with the stranger. In an environment where the narcissism of minor differences holds sway, the differences based on floor height catalyze the disintegration of social structure. For instance, the residents begin to wear badges signaling their floor height when the hostilities escalate (Ballard, *High-Rise* 141). In her seminal work, *World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Space,* Lyn Lofland traces how the people identify the strangers in a chaotic urban space from past to present day and she claims that while the appearances were what distinguished people from each other during the pre-industrial era, *"[i]n the modern city, appearances are chaotic, space is ordered"* (82). The chaotic nature of the appearances stems from the mass production of the clothes and lack of sumptuary laws which were in effect, for instance, during Elizabethan England. Thus, the spatial ordering becomes a politics through which one conducts his/her relations with the strangers. On a macro scale, the building contributes much to the spatial ordering of the city by filtering out "undesirable" members of the society. However, at a micro-level, this ordering does not stop, for this ordering has become the basic blueprint by which the residents organize their web of social relations. Thus, the vertical structure of the building consolidates the implementation of this blueprint as an agent enforcing hierarchies rather than the formation of a homogeneous community. The high-rise depicted in the novel produces a horizontal segregation in the wider urban fabric and also a vertical segregation inside itself: *"The mysterious movement of the air-hostesses […], particularly on the floors above her own clearly unsettled Alice, as if they in some way interfered with the natural order of the building, […] entirely based on floor height"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 11). Laing's sister, Alice, is just one of the spatially obsessed residents. As the novel unfolds the all floors transform into strongholds to be defended against the lower floor residents. These internal divisions strongly echo Sennett's dismissal of the purified communities which he regards as destructive by its very nature:

> The narrower the scope of a community formed by collective personality, the more destructive does the experience of fraternal feeling becomes. [...] [T]he very act of sharing becomes ever more centered upon decisions about who can belong and who cannot. [...] The more intimate, however, the less sociable. *For this process of fraternity by exclusion of "outsiders" never ends, since a collective image of "us" never solidifies. Fragmentation and internal division is the very logic of this fraternity, as the units of people who really belong get smaller and smaller. It is a version of fraternity which leads to fratricide.* (*The Uses of Disorder* 266). [italics mine]

The uneven distribution of the public spaces, too, if not the verticality itself alone, further consolidates the self-defeating nature of the fraternity. Drawing from Frank Lloyd Wright, Sennett voices the need for evenly distributed public spaces rather than public spaces located on the top or the ground level in the planning of high-rises (*The Uses of Disorder* 158). The spatial organization of Ballard's building completely dismisses this requirement which may alleviate the socio-spatial tensions. In a building ridden with hierarchical consciousness, arranging the top floor as the only internal public space of the building is likely to create controversy. For instance, Royal calls Laing to the upper floors to play squash. However, his true aim is to observe the reactions of his guests on the terrace to a lower floor resident. Indeed, the elegantly dressed "well-to-do" guests throw menacing looks towards Laing whose presence in a "private domain" seems puzzling (Ballard, *High-Rise* 19). The banishment of the children from playing in the sculpture garden (Ballard, *High-Rise* 46) which had been designed by Royal specifically for the use of the children (Ballard, *High-Rise* 103) is another example of strong identification with the floor heights. These examples have proven that securing homogeneity becomes an unattainable goal in the supposedly purified communities as a result of identity obsession. However, there is also another factor that subtly undermines the social bonds and social organization in the novel. The following section aims to ascertain to what extent the affluence of residents is responsible for the violence in the novel.

Social Consequences of Affluence

During a lecture at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Sennett points out that *"[i]nstead of making poor communities rich, we should learn from them"*, implying the positive social outcomes of scarcity ("The Open City"). In a similar vein, Ballard states that *"Marxism is a social philosophy for the poor, whereas what we need nowadays is a social philosophy for the rich, which is what most people are"* ("J.

G. Ballard." (an interview with Jon Savage)..." 108). By "rich", Ballard refers to an arriving class which is not related to manual labor power nor has the ownership of the means of production; yet has enough affluence to fulfill their consumerist desires. Ballard's preoccupation with this class can also be observed in his *Cocaine Nights* (1996), in which economic scarcity is simply removed from the lives of the characters. In this novel, Sanger, a psychiatrist, makes a crucial prediction concerning such communities*:*

> [People] will retire in their late thirties, with fifty years of idleness in front of them. [...] But how do you energize people, give them some sense of community? [...] Politics are a pastime for a professional caste and fail to excite the rest of us. Religious belief demands a vast effort of imaginative and emotional commitment [...]. Only one thing is left which can rouse people, threaten them directly and force them to act together [...] Crime and transgressive behavior. (180).

Although the characters in *High-Rise* are not the retired individuals to whom Sanger refers, the hours of the day they pass in their workplaces gradually diminish during the course of the novel, which indicates that working to earn money is no longer a pressing issue in their lives. The lack of materialistic needs (food, shelter, etc.) works in two interrelated ways in the novel: firstly, it leads to boredom, which, in turn, instigates the acts of violence that, according to the narrator, *"represented a stand against de-cerebration"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 69), which is also in line with Sanger's commentary and secondly, fostering the ideals of individualism, it leads to a lack of cooperation between the residents.

Boredom and idleness as a result of abundance and technology, the *sine qua non* for many utopian texts and contexts, are essentially recent phenomena that are intimately related to modernity. While the phenomenon of boredom had been a privilege of the noblemen and courtiers, *"in today's society [it] has been universalized and democratized"* (Kustermans and Ringmar 1776). Drawing a pessimistic picture of rising affluence, the economist John M. Keynes warns that man will soon face a problem as to *"how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well"* (367). The community in *High-Rise* faces exactly this problem. As their daily hours of work diminish and as they cannot find anything to dedicate themselves, the boredom from which they suffer leads them to socially unacceptable behavior. As the narrator states, these people *"[were] content to do nothing but sit in his over-priced apartment, watch television with the sound turned*

down, and wait for his neighbours to make a mistake" (Ballard, *High-Rise* 44). Since boredom appears to be one of the reasons for violence in the building, the neighbors assault each other not for anything that will eventually settle the disputes but for the sensation seeking. Furthermore, several studies carried out on the relation between the boredom and socially unacceptable behavior indicate that the boredom may result in aggression (Baumeister and Campbell 219), impulsivity (Watt and Vodanovich 689) and disregard for rules (McGiboney and Carter 741). Not only the interpersonal relations but also the relations between the residents and the architecture of the building confirm these observations. The building, with its flat, geometric and unadorned surfaces, represents the boredom of the residents and the building itself falls prey to the sensation-seeking of its residents, as it is well illustrated when the walls are begun to be aerosolled by the residents (Ballard, *High-Rise* 55-56). As it were, the violence in the building is a mutiny against the built environment. However, the aim of the mutiny is not the establishment of an alternative social order but the breakdown of the order itself. The mutiny is against the order that the modernist planning prescribes and it is also against the utopian aspirations of 20th century massive urban projects. Moreover, Royal's Janus-faced position regarding the order of the building ceases to be a paradox and comes to be explained in a relation of causality. Although he is one of the architects who designed the modernist apartment building whose most salient characteristics are order and hygiene, he gradually exposes his contempt for these traits. Designing an impeccable order is a purposive act that would later invite violence into the community life. That is the reason why he thinks that the *"breakdown of the high-rise might well mark its success rather than failure"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 96). Correlatively, the homogeneity of the community members fuels the urge to violate the rules. Sennett explains this paradox in the affluent communities as follows:

> [T]he eruption of social tension becomes a situation in which the ultimate methods of aggression, violent force and reprisal, seem to become not only justified, but life preserving. It is a terrible paradox that the escalation of discord into violence comes to be, in these communities, the means by which "law and order" should be maintained. (*The Uses of Disorder* 45).

Although Sennett highlights a need for disorder for the urban dwellers to grow mature, he restricts it to those situations in which aggression can be diverted to the objects or to those disagreements that can be settled through negotiations. However, the disorder which the residents of the high-rise attempt to create is not a

"Sennettian" disorder in that there is no safety valve that may prevent the aggression from transforming into physical violence, for they, for reasons discussed in the previous sections, do not have the social competence to keep this transformation in check.

Another outcome of the homogeneity and affluence is the lack of social cooperation. Supported also by the credit system[2], the characters are able to own anything they wish to have. The narrator describes this new social class as follows: *"These people were the first to master a new kind of late twentieth-century life. They thrived on [...] the lack of involvement with others, and the total self-sufficiency of lives which, needing nothing, were never disappointed"* (44). The portrayal of these characters serves to question the sustainability of social bonds in affluent communities. Sennett regards "scarcity" a socializing factor in the neighborhoods:

> [I]n communities that are poor, or in times of scarcity, sharing between individuals and families is a necessary element of survival. [...] It is the hallmark of abundance that the need for such sharing disappears. [...] Thus the necessity for social interaction, the necessity to share is no longer a driving force in communities of abundance; men can withdraw into their self-contained, self-sustaining homes. [...] Abundance, in other words, increases the power to create isolation in communal contacts at the same time that it opens up an avenue by which men can easily conceive of their social relatedness in terms of their similarity rather than their need for each other. (*The Uses of Disorder* 48).

This observation problematizes any definition of community which includes the interdependence of the members as an aspect of it when the defining characteristic of any community is its affluence.[3] The complicated technical knowledge that enables the construction of the high-rise and the affluence which enables its ownership serve nothing but the oversimplification of human relations. The functionalism of the building, coupled with the affluence of the residents, turns the building into a *"huge machine designed to serve, not the collective body of tenants, but the individual*

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[2] For example, Laing buys his apartment with a 99-year lease.

3 Robert E. Park (1936) lists three defining characteristics of a community, of which the third is *"a relationship of mutual interdependence that is symbiotic"* (4).

residents in isolation" (Ballard, *High-Rise* 6). Thus, returning to Sennett's argument in his lecture, what is needed to be learned from the poor is revealed to be a culture of cooperation which the affluent may easily disregard. At this point, it is not argued that the lack of cooperation necessarily leads to violence as described in *High-Rise.* However, the lack of cooperation and the lack of lack simply degrade the need to be civilized in the interpersonal relations of the residents[4] and absorbed in their narcissistic illusions of self-sufficiency, the members of the community in *High-Rise* no longer need to assume socially acceptable behavior. As the narrator suggests the residents are *"passengers on board an automatically piloted airliner"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 44), which enables them to *"behave in any way they wished, explore the darkest corners they could find"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 45). Adrian Talbot, a psychiatrist whom Ballard occasionally uses as a mouthpiece, confirms the negative results of the sense of completeness, diagnosing the residents as *"outraged by all that over-indulgent toilet training, dedicated breast-feeding and parental affection- obviously a more dangerous mix than anything our Victorian forebears had to cope with"* (Ballard, *High-Rise* 153). Although this observation is not strictly relevant to material abundance that is stressed above, it is, nevertheless, associated with the sense of completeness which the residents seem to enjoy but in reality, suffer from. In a way that confirms Talbot's commentary, Sennett maintains that while hysteria, resulting from repressive mechanisms, was the most common nervous disorder in the 19th century, narcissism, resulting from the sense of completeness, has replaced it in the 20th century (*The Fall of Public Man* 326). The residents, overprotected by their parents during their childhood, do not cease to be overprotected by their economic immunity which protects them not only from the sense of lack but also from the differences in the wider urban space. However, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, playing with the immune system, as an analogy with social relations, is *"risky business and may prove pathogenic in its own right"* (*Liquid Modernity* 105). Extending this analogy to *High-Rise* again, one may conclude that since the members of the community have not received any weakened microorganism, a metaphor that can be used for heterogeneities and lack, into their bodies, their immunity has remained unguarded

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4 Though it may be a topic of a different study, Lacanian psychoanalysis may be relevant in understanding this mechanism. In the Lacanian psychoanalysis, only if one accepts symbolic castration and the resultant lack, does he becomes a speaking subject. The lack in which the subject is constituted is what drives him into the wider social sphere where he seeks recognition. On the social and cultural outcomes of affluence see Todd McGowan's *The End of Dissatisfaction?: Jacques Lacan and the Emergent Society of Enjoyment.*

against any minor threat which could easily be overcome by those in whose lives the differences and need for the other people are constant presences.

Conclusion

Robert T. Tally, Jr. argues that *"the literary cartography present in one narrative can become a part of future surveys, rhapsodies, and narratives, or of future maps"* (*Spatiality* 49), which has also been the underlying mechanism of this paper. Although it is a *fictional* account of urban spatial trends and there is no known record of such frenzy in any given community, *High-Rise* reveals the potentialities embedded in the structure of the homogeneous and affluent communities. As a cartographer does in his profession, Ballard determines what is to be included or highlighted in his fiction, however unlikely they may seem to the reader. Certainly, this paper has not argued that these communities, sooner or later, will transform into primitive and violent enclaves. However, it has tried to prove that the path leading to dystopia is full-fledged in the purified communities which have materiality in the social life and there is little reason why they did not fall into chaos as depicted in *High-Rise*. The formation of this path has been proven to owe much to the very characteristic of the purified communities. Since purification becomes the preeminent criterion of organizing social relations and purity turns out to be an unattainable goal as a result of narcissistic orientations, the residents in the novel indulge in the demonization of their "fellow" community members. Since these communities are principally based on a narcissistic culture, their exclusivity not only excludes the apparent "misfits" of the society but also works in ways that jeopardize the operation of the community itself. Furthermore, the social organization of the building is not constructed through shared experiences of the residents but it is a *given* in which the common identity and conformity to it conduct all interpersonal relations. Another important point contributing to the dystopic outcome in the novel has been shown to be the affluence of its residents, which, in fact, is intimately related to the purified constitution of the building, for only affluence does provide with the possibility of homogeneity and clear demarcation of the community boundaries. The novel evinces the anti-social results of affluence which strip one of the necessities of keeping social ties and which result in boredom. Of these two elements, the first devalues the civility needed to maintain such a web of relations while the latter sparks off impulsivity to overcome the boredom. Thus, the novel proves to be a critique to which the urbanists may pay regard in their planning, if not a guideline. Since Ballard himself is skeptical about the utopian aspirations, it is hardly plausible to seek a description of an ideal

environment in his writings. However, his fiction presents one of the myriads of dystopic possibilities enabled by the current built environment.

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