



## Landscapes of the Mind: Psychogeographic Drift and Psychoanalytic Regression in J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and *Concrete Island*

S. Yasmeenbanu<sup>1</sup> & Dr. Srividhya V<sup>2</sup>

1. Research Scholar, Department of English, National College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India & Assistant Professor, Department of English, Seethalakshmi Achi College for Women, Pallathur, Sivagangai, Tamil Nadu

2. Research Supervisor, Associate Professor in English, National College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India

### Abstract

This article argues that J. G. Ballard reshapes psychogeography. He converts it from an urban practice of exploratory drift into a psychoanalytic narrative of regression. Existing scholarship has examined Ballard's ecological vision, his heterotopic spaces, and his pathological modernity. However, few studies analyze how his landscapes act as instruments of unconscious reactivation. This essay reads *The Drowned World* (1962) and *Concrete Island* (1974) at the intersection of spatial theory and psychoanalysis. It draws on Sigmund Freud's concepts of regression, repetition compulsion, and the death drive. It also engages Jacques Lacan's notion of the Real and Henri Lefebvre's theory of produced space. The essay shows that Ballard's environments do more than mirror damaged subjectivity. They actively restructure it. In *The Drowned World*, ecological catastrophe collapses historical time into evolutionary deep time. The submerged metropolis externalizes the unconscious as material geography. In *Concrete Island*, late-modern infrastructure becomes a fortress of territorial regression. Primitive instincts surface beneath capitalist spatial logic. Ballard's protagonists differ sharply from Guy Debord's drifting flâneur. They are immobilized rather than mobile. Alienation in Ballard is not merely urban but psychic. It is woven into the architecture of the modern self. This study fuses psychogeography and psychoanalysis. It repositions Ballard's fiction as an inquiry into the unconscious production of place. Modernity, Ballard suggests, is a fragile veneer over hidden psychic structures.

**Keywords:** Psychogeography, Psychoanalysis, J. G. Ballard, *The Drowned World*, *Concrete Island*.

**Article History:** Received: 10 June 2026. Revised: 20 June 2026. Accepted: 10 August 2026. First published: 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2026.

**Copyright:** © 2026 by the author/s.

**License:** Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

**Published by:** Adrija Press, India.

**Citation:** Yasmeenbanu, S. & Dr. Srividhya V. (2026). Landscapes of the Mind: Psychogeographic Drift and Psychoanalytic Regression in J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and *Concrete Island*. *Newliteraria Journal* 9:1, 16-27.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.48189/nl.2026.v09i1.003>

## Introduction

In 1962, J. G. Ballard called for a turn from outer to “inner space” (Ballard, 1962/1996, p. 197). He argued that the proper terrain of modern fiction was not interplanetary travel. It was the psychic architecture shaped by contemporary environments. This conceptual shift became central to Ballard studies. Critics have read his early catastrophe novels and urban fictions through this lens. Yet the precise mechanism by which Ballard’s landscapes structure consciousness remains underexplored. His environments do not merely reflect interiority. They actively produce and reorganize it. This argument situates Ballard at the crossing of psychogeography and psychoanalysis.

Guy Debord introduced the term “psychogeography” in the 1950s. He defined it as the study of the “specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (Debord, 1955/1981, p. 8). For the Situationists, psychogeography centered on the *dérive*. The drift through urban space was meant to expose hidden affective patterns beneath capitalist rationalization. Coverley (2010) argues that this practice presupposed a mobile, resistant subject (p. 14). The drifter retained agency through movement. The city was a labyrinth to be decoded.

Much Ballard scholarship has implicitly aligned his fiction with this tradition. Duffy (2015) reads Ballard’s environments as Foucauldian heterotopias. They are “other spaces” that disrupt normative spatial logic (pp. 4–5). Luckhurst (1997) frames Ballard as a writer of dislocated geographies that destabilize cultural coherence (p. 47). Francis (2011) emphasizes Ballard’s investment in psychopathology, situating the fiction within dynamics of trauma and disturbance (pp. 2–3). These readings illuminate Ballard’s spatial and psychological concerns. However, they often treat space as either metaphor or sociological construct. The full psychoanalytic dimension of Ballard’s geography remains unexamined.

This article argues that Ballard radicalizes psychogeography. He converts it from an emancipatory urban practice into a psychoanalytic drama of regression. Two early novels stage this transformation with clarity. *The Drowned World* (Ballard, 1962/2001a) submerges London beneath a tropical lagoon. *Concrete Island* (Ballard, 1974/2001b) traps a London architect on a triangular wedge of motorway waste ground. In both texts, space acts as more than backdrop. It functions as an analytic chamber. The drowned city and the motorway island reactivate archaic psychic strata. They reveal what Freud called the persistence of primitive mental formations beneath civilized consciousness (Freud, 1930/1961a, p. 70).

The argument unfolds in five parts. The first reviews existing scholarship on Ballard’s spatial and psychoanalytic dimensions. It identifies the gap that this study addresses. The second outlines the theoretical framework. It distinguishes Ballard’s regressive psychogeography from Debord’s urban *dérive*. The third examines *The Drowned World*. It shows how ecological catastrophe externalizes the unconscious as deep time. The fourth analyzes *Concrete Island*. It traces how late-modern infrastructure produces narcissistic enclosure and repetition compulsion. The conclusion considers the broader implications. Ballard, this article argues, reveals that modernity rests precariously atop archaic psychic structures.

This intervention matters for three reasons. First, it offers a more precise account of how Ballard’s environments work. They are not merely symbolic or sociological. They are mechanisms of psychic excavation. Second, it reframes psychogeography itself. The Situationist model presumes a mobile, critical subject. Ballard’s fiction reveals the limits of that presumption. His characters are immobilized and overcome. Third, this reading speaks to current concerns. Climate collapse and infrastructural fragility have renewed interest in

## Landscapes of the Mind: Psychogeographic Drift and Psychoanalytic Regression in J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and *Concrete Island*

Ballard's prescience (Groes, 2011, p. 11). However, his diagnostic power lies less in prediction than in psychoanalytic insight. Ballard shows that environmental and infrastructural rupture do not create regression. They reveal a regression already latent within modern subjectivity.

The drowned lagoon and the motorway island differ in scale and texture. Yet they operate according to the same structural principle. Space dismantles symbolic identity and exposes archaic drives. In Ballard's hands, psychogeography ceases to be a method of urban critique. It becomes a theory of psychic architecture.

### Ballard, Space, and the Unconscious: A Review of Scholarship

Ballard scholarship has developed along several intersecting lines. Each illuminates a part of his project. None, however, fully accounts for the structural convergence of space and psyche that defines his fiction.

The first line of inquiry treats Ballard as a writer of catastrophe and speculative futurity. Luckhurst (1997) established this approach. He situates Ballard within the traditions of science fiction and literary modernism (p. 23). More recent ecocritical readings have reframed *The Drowned World* as an Anthropocene text. Groes (2011) argues that the novel anticipates current climate anxieties (p. 9). These approaches illuminate the planetary scale of Ballard's imagination. However, they often emphasize environmental warning over psychic transformation. The drowned lagoon becomes a symbol of ecological crisis. Its function as a mechanism of unconscious excavation receives less attention.

A second line of inquiry foregrounds Ballard's engagement with architecture and urban space. Duffy (2015) reads Ballard's environments as Foucauldian heterotopias (p. 4). They disrupt normative spatial arrangements. They reveal latent possibilities within the contemporary landscape. Gasiorek (2005) extends this analysis. He shows how Ballard's architectural settings encode the contradictions of late modernity (p. 89). Critics drawing on Lefebvre (1974/1991) have treated Ballard's cities and infrastructures as instances of socially produced space (p. 26). These spaces are encoded with ideological and behavioral logics. Such approaches underscore the materiality of Ballard's environments. However, they often stop short of psychoanalytic analysis. Space remains primarily a sociological category.

A third line of inquiry addresses Ballard's engagement with psychopathology. Francis (2011) emphasizes the centrality of trauma and disturbed perception in the fiction (pp. 2–3). He situates Ballard within what the writer himself called "benevolent psychopathology." Baxter (2009) analyzes the surrealist roots of Ballard's psychic imagery (p. 35). Psychoanalytic readings have explored repression, repetition, and libidinal investment. These have proven especially productive for *Crash* and *The Atrocity Exhibition*. Yet such accounts often detach psychic dynamics from spatial structure. The unconscious appears as internal disturbance rather than externalized geography.

A fourth, smaller line of inquiry has linked Ballard to psychogeography. Coverley (2010) briefly identifies him as an heir to the Situationist tradition (p. 113). Pinder (2005) examines how postwar urban fiction reshaped psychogeographic practice (p. 234). However, these treatments remain suggestive rather than systematic. The structural relation between Ballard's spaces and psychoanalytic regression has not been fully theorized.

The gap, then, is methodological. Ecocritical readings emphasize environment but understate psyche. Spatial readings emphasize architecture but understate the unconscious. Psychoanalytic readings emphasize psyche but understate space. Psychogeographic readings remain underdeveloped. What is missing is an integrated framework. Such a framework would

treat Ballard's environments as simultaneously material, social, and unconscious structures.

This article fills that gap. It reads Ballard at the intersection of Lefebvre's spatial theory and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis. The drowned metropolis of *The Drowned World* and the motorway island of *Concrete Island* are produced spaces in Lefebvre's sense. They are residues of industrial modernity and late-capitalist infrastructure. Yet they exceed their social origins. Once their symbolic functions destabilize, they begin to operate as psychic catalysts. They externalize the unconscious within material geography.

This reading has implications for how psychogeography itself is understood. Debord's *dérive* presupposes a subject capable of decoding the city. Ballard's protagonists cannot decode anything. They are decoded *by* the spaces they inhabit. The drift, in Ballard, is not lateral and elective. It is downward and compelled. It moves not through urban labyrinths but into the strata of the unconscious. This shift transforms psychogeography. It becomes less a method of urban critique and more a theory of psychic architecture.

### **From Urban Drift to Psychic Descent: Reframing Psychogeography**

Debord's psychogeography rests on a specific subject. The drifter is mobile, attentive, and resistant. He moves through the city to expose what spectacle conceals (Debord, 1955/1981, p. 9). The *dérive* destabilizes the routines of capitalist circulation. It maps emotional geographies that bureaucratic planning has obscured. Coverley (2010) summarizes the position succinctly. Psychogeography seeks to recover the city's hidden voices (p. 110). The subject acts. Space responds.

Ballard's fiction inverts this structure. His protagonists do not act on space. Space acts on them. Mobility collapses into stasis. Agency yields to compulsion. The result is not affective mapping but psychoanalytic excavation. To clarify this transformation, three theoretical resources prove essential: Lefebvre's account of produced space, Freud's account of regression and the death drive, and Lacan's account of the Real.

Lefebvre (1974/1991) argues that space is not a neutral container. It is socially constructed and historically contingent (p. 26). Capitalism produces particular kinds of space: motorways, industrial zones, suburban estates. These spaces encode ideological and behavioral logics. They train bodies to circulate, consume, and conform. Ballard accepts this premise. His environments are clearly products of modern spatial rationality. The drowned London of *The Drowned World* is the residue of industrial expansion. The motorway interchange of *Concrete Island* is the byproduct of postwar transport planning.

However, Ballard pushes beyond Lefebvre's sociological frame. His environments do more than encode ideology. Once destabilized, they reactivate archaic psychic formations. Produced space becomes generative of regression. This is the move that distinguishes Ballard from earlier psychogeographic traditions. He does not treat space as merely social. He treats it as psychically generative.

Freud provides the theoretical vocabulary for understanding this generativity. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud (1930/1961a) insists that primitive mental formations persist beneath the structures of civilized life (p. 44). They do not disappear. They are merely repressed. Under conditions of stress or rupture, they can resurface. Ballard's landscapes function as precisely such conditions. Environmental catastrophe in *The Drowned World* dissolves historical continuity. Infrastructural enclosure in *Concrete Island* strips away professional identity. In both cases, archaic drives return.

Two further Freudian concepts are relevant. The first is repetition compulsion. In

## Landscapes of the Mind: Psychogeographic Drift and Psychoanalytic Regression in J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and *Concrete Island*

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (1920/1961b) argues that subjects unconsciously reenact traumatic or archaic scenarios (p. 36). The compulsion reflects deeper drives that exceed rational interest. Kerans's southward journey in *The Drowned World* aligns with this dynamic. Maitland's repeated returns to the center of the island in *Concrete Island* exemplify it more directly. Both protagonists reenact rather than resolve.

The second Freudian concept is the death drive. Freud (1920/1961b) posits that all living organisms harbor a tendency toward inorganic stasis (p. 38). They strive to return to an earlier, less differentiated state. The flooded lagoons and rising heat of Ballard's drowned world enact this dynamic literally. Civilization dissolves into entropy. The motorway island, though hyper-modern in design, functions analogously. It produces a pocket of stagnation within the circulation it was meant to facilitate.

Lacan's notion of the Real adds a further dimension. The Real designates that which resists symbolic integration (Lacan, 1973/1978, p. 53). It is the residue that language cannot capture. Ballard's environments are saturated with such residue. The drowned lagoons exceed cartographic mastery. The motorway island defies the rational planning that produced it. Immobilized within these spaces, the subject confronts the limits of the Symbolic order. Identity fractures. The unconscious becomes spatially visible.

Together, these theoretical resources reframe psychogeography. The Situationist *dérive* moves laterally through urban space. Ballard's drift moves downward through psychic strata. Debord's psychogeography assumes a stable, resistant subject. Ballard's reveals that the subject was never stable. It has always rested on repressed drives that infrastructure and ideology only partially conceal.

The political stakes shift accordingly. For Debord, drift is emancipatory. It exposes capitalist alienation and reclaims agency. For Ballard, alienation has already penetrated too deeply. It is no longer merely external. It is structural to subjectivity itself. When environmental or infrastructural rupture cracks the surface, what emerges is not a new freedom. It is the old archaic substrate that civilization had been pressing down. Ballard's psychogeography is therefore not emancipatory but revelatory. It uncovers what modernity has tried to bury.

The next two sections show how this dynamic operates in two distinct spatial configurations. *The Drowned World* externalizes the unconscious through evolutionary deep time. *Concrete Island* externalizes it through infrastructural enclosure. Together, they demonstrate that modern space is not merely socially produced. It is unconsciously generative.

### **Submerged Unconscious: Deep Time and the Death Drive in *The Drowned World***

*The Drowned World* opens on a balcony. Robert Kerans watches the sun rise behind dense groves of giant gymnosperms (Ballard, 1962/2001a, p. 5). The plants crowd over the roofs of abandoned department stores. The image is precise and disorienting. Twentieth-century commercial architecture and Triassic flora share the same frame. The landscape presents itself as a palimpsest. Historical epochs do not succeed each other. They coexist.

This juxtaposition is not incidental. It establishes the novel's central premise. The catastrophe that drowned the city has not erased its history. It has reorganized that history into simultaneity. The submerged lagoon becomes a material image of Freud's archaeological psyche. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud (1930/1961a) famously compares the mind to the city of Rome (p. 70). Earlier structures remain embedded beneath later developments. Nothing is fully lost. Ballard literalizes this metaphor. The drowned metropolis externalizes the layered composition of the unconscious.

The novel reinforces this externalization through its temporal logic. As global temperatures rise, equatorial conditions advance northward. Kerans begins to experience recurring dreams of primordial lagoons and reptilian life. He gradually recognizes that these dreams do not reflect personal memory. They emerge from a deeper inheritance. The narrative articulates this directly: “the terrestrial and psychic landscapes were now indistinguishable” (Ballard, 1962/2001a, p. 69). This sentence marks the novel’s conceptual core. Geography does not symbolize interiority. It merges with it.

What Freud (1920/1961b) termed phylogenetic residue clarifies this merging (p. 38). Phylogenetic residue refers to archaic experiences encoded within species memory. Ballard’s environment reactivates such residues. Heat and water act as catalysts. They strip away the symbolic scaffolding of modernity. The unconscious surfaces as landscape.

Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious offers a complementary frame. Jung (1959/1981) posits a repository of archetypal imagery inherited from humanity’s evolutionary past (p. 42). Kerans’s dreams of prehistoric lagoons resemble such archetypal returns. They are not idiosyncratic fantasies. They are manifestations of a deeper psychic inheritance triggered by environmental conditions. The drowning of the city removes the symbolic scaffolding. Archetypal images surface. The lagoon becomes both literal swamp and psychic matrix.

The novel’s solar imagery intensifies this dynamic. The sun is no longer life-giving. It becomes a “colossal fire-ball” whose “relentless power” drums against Kerans’s body (Ballard, 1962/2001a, p. 5). Heat functions as both ecological and psychic pressure. It erodes rational structures. It accelerates regression. Freud’s notion of the death drive provides a powerful interpretive lens. The drive describes a tendency to return to an earlier, less differentiated state (Freud, 1920/1961b, p. 31). The flooded lagoons and expanding swamps suggest precisely such a return. Civilization, with its rigid architecture and symbolic order, dissolves into a humid, entropic environment that approximates pre-human existence.

Kerans’s behaviour confirms this trajectory. The military expedition led by Colonel Riggs intends to evacuate northward. Riggs represents technological rationality and disciplinary order. He attempts to map and document the transformed city. His surveys cling to bureaucratic procedure. Yet they appear futile against the scale of ecological change. In Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) terms, the produced space of modern urbanism has collapsed (p. 26). What remains privileges instinct over calculation.

Kerans aligns himself increasingly with this entropy. He resists rescue. He cuts off radio communication. He withdraws into a decaying hotel suite. The narrative describes the “subtle atmosphere of melancholy” that surrounds the ruins (Ballard, 1962/2001a, p. 7). His withdrawal is not exhaustion. It is alignment. Freud’s repetition compulsion clarifies the pattern. Subjects unconsciously reenact scenarios that align with deeper drives, even when reenactment appears self-destructive (Freud, 1920/1961b, p. 36). Kerans’s southward journey enacts this logic. The farther he moves toward the equator, the closer he approaches dissolution.

The uncanny quality of the drowned city deepens its psychoanalytic resonance. Freud (1919/1955) defines the uncanny as the return of something once familiar but repressed (p. 241). Ballard’s submerged London exemplifies this condition. Familiar urban landmarks reappear in distorted form. They are half-buried beneath algae and silt. The white facades of hotels persist. They are invaded by reptilian vegetation and stagnant water. The city is both itself and not itself. This spatial ambivalence destabilizes symbolic certainty. It produces what Freud (1919/1955) calls intellectual uncertainty about the boundary between imagination and reality (p. 230). In Ballard’s narrative, this uncertainty extends beyond perception. It reorganizes identity.

## Landscapes of the Mind: Psychogeographic Drift and Psychoanalytic Regression in J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and *Concrete Island*

Importantly, Ballard does not portray Kerans's regression as madness in any conventional sense. The novel refuses moralizing language. Regression appears not as pathology but as rational response to altered conditions. The military expedition seems increasingly irrelevant. Riggs's discipline cannot match the scale of the catastrophe. Kerans's surrender, by contrast, achieves a strange coherence. As he journeys deeper into the lagoons, he experiences clarity rather than confusion. The novel's final pages suggest that regression offers a form of integration inaccessible within rigid symbolic structures.

Luckhurst (1997) observes that Ballard's catastrophe novels resist the apocalyptic conventions of their genre (p. 53). They do not depict survivors striving heroically against environmental collapse. They depict subjects who recognize the catastrophe as revelation. Gasiorek (2005) extends this insight. He argues that Ballard's disasters function as phenomenological events that strip subjectivity to its archaic core (p. 41). *The Drowned World* exemplifies this dynamic with precision. The catastrophe does not introduce regression. It reveals that regression has been latent all along.

The novel's emphasis on stasis differentiates Ballard's psychogeography from the Situationist model. There is no active wandering through labyrinthine streets. Characters are immobilized by heat and water. They are confined to balconies and boats drifting across flooded avenues. Stasis intensifies introspection. The city does not invite exploration. It imposes contemplation. In this immobilized environment, the unconscious becomes spatially visible. The lagoon reflects not only the sky but the submerged structures of architecture and psyche.

*The Drowned World* thus stages a radical psychogeography. Environmental catastrophe functions as psychoanalytic event. It destabilizes symbolic coordinates. It forces confrontation with archaic drives that civilization has repressed. The drowned metropolis becomes Freud's Rome rendered aquatic. Ballard's innovation lies in externalizing the psychic model into physical geography. Space itself acts as analyst. It dissolves defences. It exposes the primitive substratum of the human mind.

### **Infrastructure and Regression: Repetition Compulsion in *Concrete Island***

If *The Drowned World* stages regression through ecological catastrophe, *Concrete Island* relocates that descent. The novel transposes the drama into the heart of late-capitalist infrastructure. The prehistoric lagoon gives way to the motorway interchange. Solar entropy is replaced by concrete embankment and traffic circulation. Yet the psychic mechanism remains continuous. Ballard demonstrates that regression does not require planetary catastrophe. Modern infrastructure itself is sufficient to excavate the unconscious.

The novel opens with a violent rupture. Robert Maitland is an architect. He drives a Jaguar at high speed along a London motorway. A blowout sends him through a barrier and down an embankment (Ballard, 1974/2001b, pp. 9–10). He lands on a triangular island of waste ground formed by intersecting motorways. The accident is framed as both contingency and unconscious desire. Maitland himself recognizes that he may have “almost wilfully devised the crash” (Ballard, 1974/2001b, p. 11). This ambiguity is crucial. The crash appears less an external misfortune than an enactment of Freud's (1920/1961b) repetition compulsion (p. 36). The subject unconsciously stages scenarios aligned with deeper drives.

Unlike Kerans's slow immersion into deep time, Maitland's descent is abrupt. The motorway island is not geographically distant from London's centre. It lies at the heart of the city's circulatory system. Yet it is invisible to motorists speeding above. This invisibility marks

it as what Augé (1995) would later term a “non-place” (p. 78). It is a residual space generated by transit rather than habitation. Ballard’s innovation lies in transforming this non-place into a psychic chamber. The island becomes a heterotopic enclosure. Modern identity fractures within it. Primitive instincts reassert themselves.

At first, Maitland attempts rational escape. He inventories his injuries. He calculates distances. He tries to attract attention from passing vehicles. Yet these efforts are curiously ineffective. His signals go unnoticed. His movements are tentative. His sense of urgency diminishes. The narrative repeatedly suggests ambivalence. Freud’s theory of the death drive clarifies this pattern. The compulsion to repeat traumatic events may reflect an instinctual pull toward earlier states of being (Freud, 1920/1961b, p. 31). Maitland’s repeated returns to the centre of the island, despite opportunities to approach its edges, mirror this logic. He chooses enclosure over rescue.

The island’s geography reinforces this regression. The space is surrounded by embankments and fast-moving traffic. It forms a self-contained territory. Maitland gradually reorganizes it. He discovers food caches. He constructs shelter. He marks zones of control. Ballard describes his increasing identification with the terrain: the rubble, the rusting car chassis, the vegetation pushing through concrete (Ballard, 1974/2001b, pp. 68–70). What initially appears as waste ground becomes symbolic territory. Freud’s account of narcissism offers insight here. The ego projects itself outward. It invests objects and environments with libidinal energy (Freud, 1914/1957, p. 75). Maitland’s attachment to the island resembles such projection. The territory becomes an extension of ego-boundary.

The presence of two other inhabitants complicates this dynamic. Proctor is a brain-damaged former acrobat. Jane is a young woman intermittently exploiting the island. They function as distorted mirrors of Maitland’s own regression. Rather than forming stable alliances, Maitland oscillates between dominance and dependency. He asserts control over resources. He depends on Jane for assistance. This unstable triangulation reflects what Lacan terms the fragmentation of the subject. Without symbolic stabilization, identity scatters across rivalrous identifications (Lacan, 1973/1978, p. 76). Deprived of professional status, domestic identity, and social recognition, Maitland’s self-image fractures.

The motorway infrastructure surrounding the island intensifies this fragmentation. Traffic roars continuously overhead. Ballard renders this noise as a mechanical horizon. The vehicles are visible but inaccessible. They are symbols of circulation and mobility. Yet they contrast with Maitland’s immobilization. In Lacanian terms, the motorway represents the Symbolic order: law, structure, social circulation. The island approximates the Real, that which resists symbolic integration (Lacan, 1973/1978, p. 55). Maitland’s entrapment stages a confrontation with this Real. He cannot fully re-enter the symbolic network. He cannot entirely detach from it either. The result is psychic oscillation.

Crucially, Maitland’s regression does not lead to complete dissolution. Unlike Kerans, who embraces southward entropy, Maitland develops a form of territorial mastery. He begins to manipulate Proctor and Jane. He stages confrontations. He asserts dominance. This behaviour suggests regression not toward inorganic stasis but toward primal hierarchy. Freud’s death drive coexists with Eros: the drive toward binding and organization (Freud, 1920/1961b, p. 40). On the island, Maitland oscillates between these drives. He flirts with self-destruction. He deliberately injures himself at one point. Yet he simultaneously constructs an embryonic social order.

The island’s triangular geometry reinforces its psychic symbolism. It resembles both wound and enclosure. It is an inverted fortress embedded within the motorway’s circulatory

system. The crash that deposited Maitland there mirrors what Freud (1919/1955) describes as trauma's capacity to disrupt ego continuity (p. 234). The island becomes a site where this disruption is replayed and stabilized through repetition. Each day, Maitland reenacts the crash symbolically. He moves between the wrecked car, the embankments, and the central rubble. The spatial circuit replaces urban mobility with enclosed recurrence.

Ballard's prose underscores the paradox of modern regression. The island is entirely artificial. It is a byproduct of late-industrial planning. Yet within this hyper-rational environment, archaic behaviours emerge. Maitland hunts for food. He defends territory. He competes for dominance. Civilization's most advanced infrastructure produces primitive subjectivity. This inversion aligns with Freud's claim that civilization does not eradicate instinct (Freud, 1930/1961a, p. 44). It merely represses instinct. When symbolic frameworks weaken, even locally, instinct resurfaces.

The question of rescue remains central. Several opportunities arise for Maitland to signal successfully. Yet he repeatedly fails to take them. His failure suggests unconscious resistance. By the novel's conclusion, escape no longer appears desirable. Maitland contemplates remaining permanently. He perceives the island as the true centre of his life (Ballard, 1974/2001b, p. 172). This declaration crystallizes Ballard's radical psychogeography. The island is geographically marginal. It is psychically central. External periphery becomes internal core.

In contrast to Debord's *dérive*, the island enforces immobility. The subject does not wander. He is enclosed. The motorway's endless circulation becomes background noise to a drama of arrested development. *The Drowned World* externalizes Freud's archaeological model of the psyche. *Concrete Island* enacts Lacan's confrontation with the Real. Together, they reveal that modern infrastructure produces invisible enclaves where archaic drives can resurface.

Fisher (2014) describes Ballard's environments as sites of weird stagnation within late-capitalist temporality (p. 56). The motorway island exemplifies this dynamic. It is produced by efficiency yet generates its opposite. Maitland's regression demonstrates that the rational logic of modern planning conceals irrational depths. The motorway designed to maximize flow produces a pocket where flow stops. Beneath the smooth surface of circulation, archaic drives persist unnoticed.

If Kerans's southward journey aligns with the death drive's pull toward the evolutionary past, Maitland's enclosure stages repetition compulsion within the present. The prehistoric lagoon and the motorway interchange differ in scale and temporality. Yet both function as psychoanalytic landscapes. In each case, space dissolves the illusion of progressive modernity. It exposes the unstable architecture of the self.

### **Conclusion: Architecture of the Unconscious**

This article has argued that J. G. Ballard transforms psychogeography into a psychoanalytic drama of regression. *The Drowned World* and *Concrete Island* do not merely depict altered environments. They construct spatial laboratories. Within these laboratories, the unconscious becomes materially visible. The drowned lagoon and the motorway interchange differ in scale, temporality, and texture. Yet they operate according to a single structural principle. Space reactivates archaic psychic formations.

Three implications follow. First, this reading repositions Ballard within psychogeographic discourse. Debord's *dérive* presupposes a mobile subject. The drifter

navigates the city. He decodes hidden affective patterns. Ballard's protagonists cannot navigate. They cannot decode. They are decoded by spaces they did not choose. Kerans is drawn southward by dreams that precede conscious intention (Ballard, 1962/2001a, p. 69). Maitland crashes into infrastructure and gradually chooses not to leave (Ballard, 1974/2001b, p. 172). Mobility yields to stasis. Critique yields to compulsion. The drift, in Ballard, is not lateral but downward.

Second, this reading sharpens the psychoanalytic dimension of Ballard's fiction. Freud's theory of the unconscious provides the conceptual scaffolding. The archaeological metaphor in *Civilization and Its Discontents* describes a psyche in which earlier formations persist beneath later structures (Freud, 1930/1961a, p. 70). Ballard literalizes this metaphor as geography. Repetition compulsion and the death drive describe Kerans's southward journey and Maitland's territorial enclosure (Freud, 1920/1961b, p. 31). Lacan's notion of the Real names the residue that resists symbolic integration (Lacan, 1973/1978, p. 53). Each concept gains material specificity in Ballard's hands.

Third, this reading clarifies what Ballard reveals about modernity itself. Civilization does not eradicate instinct. It represses instinct beneath layers of functionality and progress (Freud, 1930/1961a, p. 44). Modern architecture is a thin membrane stretched over evolutionary inheritance. The drowned city and the motorway island expose the membrane's fragility. Catastrophe and rupture do not create regression. They reveal the regression that civilization had been suppressing all along.

This argument speaks to current concerns. Climate collapse and infrastructural fragility have lent Ballard a renewed prescience (Groes, 2011, p. 11). Yet his significance is not predictive. It is diagnostic. He shows that the modern subject was never as stable as it imagined. The very spaces designed to ensure stability skyscrapers, motorways, climate-controlled interiors rest on unconscious foundations. When those foundations crack, the archaic resurfaces.

This essay has not exhausted the implications of Ballard's radical psychogeography. Several directions warrant further inquiry. Ballard's later urban novels, particularly *High-Rise* and *Super-Cannes*, develop the dynamics traced here in different registers. Comparative work might productively place Ballard alongside contemporary novelists of infrastructure such as China Miéville and Tom McCarthy. Theoretical extension into recent work on the Anthropocene and on infrastructural studies could deepen the analysis.

What remains constant across these possibilities is Ballard's central insight. The true terrain of modernity is not the city as spectacle. It is the unconscious that the city conceals. Architecture, infrastructure, and catastrophe do not act upon stable selves. They are mechanisms through which the unconscious becomes visible. Space does not merely reflect the mind. It excavates it.

In this sense, Ballard's fiction proposes a quiet but radical reversal. We do not inhabit space. Space inhabits us. Beneath the smooth surfaces of late modernity the lagoons we have drained, the motorways we have built the archaic strata of psyche persist. They wait for the moment when symbolic order weakens. Then they return. Ballard's drowned cities and concrete islands are not warnings about the future. They are diagnoses of a present that was already, all along, an architecture of the unconscious.

## References

- Augé, M. (1995). *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (J. Howe, Trans.). Verso.

- Ballard, J. G. (1996). Which way to inner space? In *A user's guide to the millennium: Essays and reviews* (pp. 195–198). Picador. (Original work published 1962)
- . (2001a). *The drowned world*. Harper Perennial. (Original work published 1962)
- . (2001b). *Concrete island*. Vintage. (Original work published 1974)
- Baxter, J. (2009). *J. G. Ballard's surrealist imagination: Spectacular authorship*. Ashgate.
- Coverley, M. (2010). *Psychogeography*. Pocket Essentials.
- Debord, G. (1981). Introduction to a critique of urban geography. In K. Knabb (Ed.), *Situationist International anthology* (pp. 5–12). Bureau of Public Secrets. (Original work published 1955)
- Duffy, C. J. (2015). *Heterotopic space in selected works of J. G. Ballard* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds]. White Rose eTheses Online.
- Fisher, M. (2014). *Ghosts of my life: Writings on depression, hauntology and lost futures*. Zero Books.
- Francis, S. (2011). *The psychological fictions of J. G. Ballard*. Continuum.
- Freud, S. (1955). The uncanny. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 17, pp. 217–256). Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1919)
- . (1957). On narcissism: An introduction. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14, pp. 67–102). Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1914)
- . (1961a). *Civilization and its discontents* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1930)
- . (1961b). *Beyond the pleasure principle* (J. Strachey, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1920)
- Gasiorek, A. (2005). *J. G. Ballard*. Manchester University Press.
- Groes, S. (Ed.). (2011). *J. G. Ballard*. Bloomsbury.
- Jung, C. G. (1981). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1959)
- Lacan, J. (1978). *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1973)
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell. (Original work published 1974)
- Luckhurst, R. (1997). *"The angle between two walls": The fiction of J. G. Ballard*. Liverpool University Press.
- Pinder, D. (2005). *Visions of the city: Utopianism, power and politics in twentieth-century urbanism*. Edinburgh University Press.

### **Bio-note**

**Ms. Yasmeenbanu S.** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Seethalakshmi Achi College for Women, Pallathur, Sivagangai, Tamil Nadu. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in English and holds an M.Phil. in English Literature. She has also completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching of English (PGDTE) from EFL University, Hyderabad, and has qualified both NET and SET in English. With over fifteen years of teaching experience, she has served in several reputed institutions. Her research interests include ecocriticism, ecofeminism, gender studies, and contemporary literature. She has published research articles in national and international journals and has actively participated in conferences and academic programmes.

**Email Id:** [yasmeenbano125@gmail.com](mailto:yasmeenbano125@gmail.com) (in the mail ID there is no zero it is letter o)

**ORCID Id:** 0009-0007-6841-1286

**Dr. V. Srividhya** is an Associate Professor & Research Supervisor in the PG & Research Department of English, National College (Autonomous), affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India. Her academic interests include Literary Theory, Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Literature, and Digital Humanities. She has guided research scholars in diverse areas of English Studies and has published papers in reputed national and international journals. With extensive experience in teaching and research, she actively contributes to curriculum development and interdisciplinary studies. Her work emphasizes critical engagement with literature, theory, and contemporary cultural issues, promoting innovative approaches to literary scholarship.

**Email:** srisekar2005@gmail.com

**ORCID:** 009-0007-7691-8765

