LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Ballard's Island(s):
White Heat, National Decline and Technology After Technicity Between 'The Terminal Beach' and *Concrete Island*

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Abstract:
This essay argues that the early fiction of J.G. Ballard represents a complex commentary on the evolution of the UK's technological imaginary which gives the lie to descriptions of the country as an anti-technological society. Such descriptions were lent credence during the postwar period by a perceived crisis in English identity as the British Empire slowly broke apart and the British state appeared to enter a period of decline. Ballard's work has recently been positioned as an example of this national crisis; however, by reading the representation of landscape in the short story 'The Terminal Beach' (1964) alongside Harold Wilson's 'white heat' speech of 1963, and interpreting both in the light of David Edgerton's complication of declinist interpretations of Britain's technological revolution, this essay argues that any straightforward attempt to identify Ballard as an example of traumatised Englishness is likely to oversimplify matters. Instead it suggests that, in identifying a numinous fantasy of technology after technicity, 'The Terminal Beach' offers a much more complicated vision of the role of technology in the UK of the 1960s and early 1970s. The significance of *Concrete Island* lies in how the collision at the outset of the novel marks a move away from this technological imaginary, and a violent transition into a landscape marked by the immanent practice of technicity rather than a transcendent fantasy of technology after technicity.

Keywords: J.G. Ballard, technology, Englishness, UK, declinism, nuclear weapons.

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J.G. Ballard's 1974 novel *Concrete Island* (2008a) opens with both an eruption and an irruption, when an exploding tyre carries Robert Maitland's car through the crash barrier of the newly-built Westway and onto the island of the novel's title. This 'violent tangent' thrusts the protagonist out of a landscape characterised by technologically determined modernity – the world of the 'white [...] line' and 'long curve' (7) with which Ballard's work of this period is commonly associated, and which Richard Brown (2016) connects in his contribution to this special issue with the architecture of Jean Balladur – and plunges him into a previously unseen hinterland of urban detritus. But while Maitland feels like he has passed through a 'vent of hell' (7), the landscape that greets him as he gathers his senses is, as Sue Robertson (2016) suggests, represented as curiously beautiful and even restorative. In being ruined by the collision, his car is transformed from a sleek fetish item into a battered assemblage of components that provides both his immediate means of survival and a way of demonstrating his mastery over the island and its inhabitants. Maitland is thus placed in an ironic relation to the protagonist of *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe [1719] 2008), whose isolation from his European homeland permits him to demonstrate his technical capacities as a modern individual by subordinating the *terra nova* of the desert island to his singular will. Similarly, to the extent that *Concrete Island* continues Ballard's attempt in *Crash* to understand the significance of 'the automobile and its technological landscape' to late twentieth-century Western society ([1973] 2008b: 80), the blowout at the outset of the novel creates an opportunity to dramatise in comparative isolation the role played by technology in the *production* of such a landscape. Maitland's violent irruption into the island might appear to mark a regressive transition in its destruction of a technological object; however, this moment also allows for a recognition of technology beyond its reification in the commodities of a massified society, revealing to the protagonist its significance not as an object or set of objects but as a form of instrumental knowledge.

In Ancient Greek philosophy this form of knowledge was referred to as *technē* (τέχνη) and opposed to other kinds of knowledge, chief among them *epistēmē* (ἐπιστήμη). Typically, only *epistēmē* is translated into English as 'knowledge', with *technē* usually being translated as 'art', in the sense of artifice; however, as Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, both terms describe the 'part [...] of the soul [...] which grasps a rational principle'. What differentiates them is their relation to truth: where '*[t]he object of contemplation is truth [itself,] that of calculation is truth corresponding with right desire*' ([c.350bc] 2009: 103, emphasis in original). Thus while *epistēmē* describes a form of knowledge which, through contemplation, seeks truth in and for itself, *technē* – or technicity – describes a form of knowledge which, through calculation, seeks to locate the instrumental or practical value lying within truth.

This appeal to classical philosophy might seem incongruously ahistorical in the context of a special issue that seeks to understand Ballard's place within late twentieth century culture. However, I want to suggest that a more rarefied understanding of the relationship between technology, modernity and subjectivity can be useful in understanding how the rediscovery of technicity staged in *Concrete Island* relates to, and reflects upon, the historical moment of its composition. Craig Martin (2016)

contextualises this rediscovery in the context of the adhocist movement of the 1970s, suggesting that Maitland's travails on the island represent a liberatory undoing of the vertically integrated mechanics of Fordist production. Read in this way, the violent transition between the 'technologised' landscape of the Westway and a hinterland marked by the practice of technicity might be argued to mark the threshold of postmodernity as it is characterised by David Harvey ([1989] 1991): that is, as a regime of capital accumulation under which production becomes increasingly flexible and oriented towards a desire for greater individuation and self-expression among consumer-citizens. In keeping with the tendency to identify Ballard as a sage or soothsayer, such a reading might argue that, arriving around the midway point in a decade that introduced the phrase 'structural adjustment programme' to the economic lexicon (see Mohan et al 2000), *Concrete Island* anticipates significant changes that would take place in the spatial arrangement of capitalism over the subsequent two decades. Indeed, something akin to such an 'anticipatory' account of *Concrete Island*'s significance is provided in this special issue by Jarrad Keyes (2016), who places the novel alongside Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* ([1973] 1975), published one year earlier, and examines the way in which Ballard's novel anticipates how forms of suburban development during the 1970s and 1980s disrupted the dichotomy examined by Williams in his cultural-historical study of urban development between the eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.

Without demurring from these approaches, I would like to offer a reading of the place of *Concrete Island* that acknowledges its status as a point of departure within Ballard's *oeuvre*, anticipating changes which would soon have a dramatic impact on the British landscape, but focuses a little more on the period it brings to a close than on the one it anticipates. Like Jeannette Baxter's (2016) reading of the novel, which looks back to its archive rather than forward to the social changes that it anticipates, my interpretation seeks to complicate the relative historiographic simplicity of the 'watershed moment' as a mechanism for understanding Ballard's place within accounts of postwar British fiction. But if Baxter's essay locates Ballard's work within a wider genealogy of European Surrealism, I would like to focus on its position within a postwar context in which English culture was perceived to be in decline even as the British state experienced large-scale modernisation, as its enormous wartime military machinery was channelled into civilian endeavours. More specifically, I want to position the irruption at the start of *Concrete Island* as the threshold between a particular attitude towards technicity that coincided with the supposed 'technological revolution' that Britain experienced over the course of the 1960s, whose perceived failure has been too readily incorporated into declinist accounts of the relationship between English culture and the British state's policies regarding technological development (see Wiener 1985). The underlying position of my argument is thus that, though frequently – and often rightly – characterised as anticipating changes that would take place within the wider West throughout postmodernity, Ballard's fiction can also be positioned as a rebuke to certain myths concerning the place of technology within the country in which he was writing. In order to understand how Maitland's isolation on the titular space of *Concrete Island* relates to Ballard's location within the literature of another island – Great Britain – I will appeal to another of Ballard's narratives which takes place on yet another island: that of Eniwetok,

the setting for the 1964 short story 'The Terminal Beach' (2006a). In doing so, my hope is to position Ballard as not just a prognosticator, but also an intelligent observer of the recent past and present of his adopted country.

The Nationless Ballard

I write 'adopted country' because situating Ballard geographically is quite a lot more complicated than it might seem, a problem evidenced in the fact that many of his appraisers identify geography as a significant but rather ambivalent component of his biography (Gasiorek 2005; Groes 2008; Luckhurst 1997). Ballard's status as a dislocated Englishman has frequently been used as a way of explaining the geographical ambivalence of his writing, which has been uneasily incorporated into the canon of postwar British literature despite the fact that it was produced and published almost exclusively in England, and is frequently set in the English (and British) capital. Ballard's importance to the British New Wave of science fiction (sf) is often recorded in the critical literature surrounding his work, but his wider position within the context of English culture of the postwar period is rarely articulated without being qualified in some way (see, for instance, Baker 2008). The critical consensus tends to be that, although it is possible to trace English influences and antecedents, Ballard was something of an outlier: active in England and commenting upon it, but only in a complicated and somewhat etiolated sense *of* it. Ballard himself would probably agree with this consensus. His own comments suggest that his formative experiences were in the 'cruel and lurid world' of Japanese occupied Shanghai (Ballard 2008d: 29) rather than the England of the 1950s and 1960s, when he began publishing his work. And in an interview towards the end of his life he argues that he has not 'explored Englishness in the usual sense of social customs, manners, behaviour, dress and codes of conduct and so on [...] I like to think that I've fled from all that and viewed it through the same exasperated eyes of any French or American visitor tired of having to decode our little ways' (Ballard and Baxter 2008: 123).

   Indeed, Ballard's characters and settings seem at first glance to have little about them that is 'English' in any meaningful sense of the word. Nationality in the early stories is circumstantial, and even if a specifically English setting is signposted in his 1961 novel *The Wind from Nowhere* (1974), 1962's *The Drowned World* (2008e), and the novels from the early 1970s, it is not difficult to imagine these narratives taking place elsewhere. Evidence of this is provided by the easy deracination of the characters in *Crash* from West London to North America in David Cronenberg's film adaptation of the novel (1996), shot in Toronto. However, more apposite to this special issue is the fact that, during the complicated composition of *Concrete Island* – a text which, as Christopher Beckett's archival research shows, was first drafted as a novel, subsequently adapted into a screenplay, and finally completed in its original prose fiction form (Beckett 2015: 17) – Maitland's own nationality is somewhat unclear. In the screenplay he is described as 'a 35-year-old New Yorker, an ambitious but relaxed and completely self-controlled man' (Ballard n.d.: f.2). Yet, as if to hint at the ultimate unimportance of nationality, no mention of this detail occurs in the finished novel, even though Maitland's character remains much the same as he is described in the screenplay.[1]

The conclusion might be that Ballard's stories and novels could be set anywhere, and that their specific location is less a question of geography than psychology. A common observation from Ballard's appraisers is that his narratives actually take place in 'inner space', a psychological site where the pathologies of the twentieth century West run rampant, and whose exploration by sf Ballard calls for in his 1962 manifesto for *New Worlds*, 'Which Way to Inner Space?' (1996). And yet Philip Tew has suggested recently that such interpretations tend to 'overstat[e] the author's exoticised identity' (2013: 148), and argues that the 'effacement of Ballard's Englishness has meant that little serious critical attention has been paid to [his] engagement with a particular kind of Englishness' that was 'in crisis postwar, much of its uncertainty mirroring symbolically [...] a fractured identity which had been central during the British Empire' (153). Tew's contention is all the more significant for relating to Ballard's output from the first novel the author considered worthwhile (*The Drowned World*) right up to the last novel he wrote before his death (*Kingdom Come* ([2006] 2007)). According to this analysis, more or less Ballard's entire career can be read in terms of a 'traumatic economy of identity and loss [written] from the perspective of a bourgeois insider, part of that class which was closest both to imperial decline and to new forms of professional elevation at home' (Tew 2013: 150). However, Tew marks *Concrete Island* out for particular attention because of the way it explores the 'class antagonisms of postwar English culture' (154) in the experience of its protagonist as he seeks to project his own physically compromised power over a scrap of land isolated by the Westway and M4 motorways in West London. '[L]ike the colonially deprived upper-middle and professional class', Tew writes, 'Maitland finds it necessary to reformulate his identity and practices, his fate symbolising the ongoing necessity to shed imperial realities' (155). Maitland's journey from 'initial self-pity to a sense of purpose, control, and sovereignty' (156) can thus be read as an ironic comment on Englishness at a time when the country was transitioning from imperial hegemony into postwar decline, and *Concrete Island* deserves to be positioned as a significant expression of 'the shifting iconography of identity [which] defines the many conflicts and [...] traumas at the heart of so many of [Ballard's] novels' (160).

'White Heat' and Declinist Historiography

Tew's focus on Ballard's relationship with the particular context of postwar England is welcome, and I want to develop it further by exploring how, to a greater extent than many critics have been willing to acknowledge, Ballard's writing reflects and comments upon the context in which it was written. However, I want to complicate the way in which Tew's account reads Ballard's work within an historical framework of decline, and I intend to do this by focusing on Ballard's representation of landscape, which I will read in the light of the so-called 'technological revolution' of the 1960s. This historical moment is conventionally taken to have been heralded by Labour leader Harold Wilson's speech to his party's annual conference at Scarborough in October 1963, in which he argued that the UK's future would be 'forged in the white heat of this revolution' (Wilson 1963: 7). In an attempt to counter what Michael Dintenfass (1992: 15) describes as the 'charge of excessive technological conservatism' that had been levelled against

British industry as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, Wilson sought to repurpose 'scientific wealth for the task of creating, not the means of human destruction, but the munitions of peace' (1963: 7). Following electoral victory in 1964, the Labour administration established a Ministry of Technology that was led by Frank Cousins until the general election of 1966, after which Wilson replaced him with the more radical Anthony Wedgwood Benn. A number of significant interventions were enacted under these ministers, but Wilson's speech is usually positioned as an important moment of false optimism in declension narratives about postwar Britain: as Andrew Gamble writes, '[A]n array of virtuous policies, accepted by both parties and implemented with such vigour, could surely not fail. But in general they did' (1990: 120). The call for modernisation heralded by the Scarborough address has thus tended to be characterised as a failed attempt to reverse the UK's global diminution by reinvigorating research and development and taking science and technology into the heart of a governmental apparatus dominated by graduates in law, the arts and the humanities. Together with the Robbins Report into higher education (1963) – which was also published in October 1963, also contained recommendations concerning the expansion of science and technology teaching in Britain's universities, and has also been described as at best a qualified success (see, for example, Sherwood 1973) – Wilson's speech is usually positioned as an instance of the British state's fitful and fruitless attempts at national renaissance in the context of long-term desuetude. If the technological revolution was not stillborn to begin with, these accounts suggest, it was certainly over within a decade. Indeed, as Martin J. Wiener writes in his influential declinist history of British industrialism, '[a] new cultural phenomenon came of age in the 1970s: explicit and organized opposition to the results of technical and material advance' (1985: 165). Contrary to the economic historians mentioned thus far, however, Wiener is emphatic in attributing the UK's long economic decline from its industrial apogee to the fact that '[t]he English nation […] became ill at ease enough with its prodigal progeny to deny its legitimacy by adopting a conception of Englishness that virtually excluded industrialism' (5).

This reading of the UK's 'white heat' moment would appear to lend ballast to Tew's discussion of Ballard. The opening years of Ballard's career are basically coeval with the period of the technological revolution, and so one might expect his writing to have been influenced by the national discussion surrounding it. His first stories were published in the years just prior to C.P. Snow's 1959 Reid lecture at the University of Cambridge, in which Snow bemoaned the absence of scientific and technical knowledge in British government – ideas he subsequently developed in *The Two Cultures: A Second Look*, published in the same year as Wilson's speech ([1963] 2012). Ballard's first cycle of novels – the disaster trilogy *The Drowned World*, *The Burning World* (republished as *The Drought* (Ballard 2002)) and *The Crystal World* (Ballard 2008c) – were published in 1962, 1964/65 and 1966 respectively, as Snow's argument was resonating throughout British governmental culture and Wilson began moving science and technology to the centre of the Labour Party's platform. And the violent and self-consciously obscene 'concrete and steel' cycle anticipated by the stories in the 1970 collection *The Atrocity Exhibition* (2006b) and continued in 1973's *Crash*, 1974's *Concrete Island* and 1975's *High-Rise* (2006c)

conform with the period when the technocratic optimism of the 1960s returned abruptly to cultural pessimism as Britain experienced the effects of the 1973 oil crisis, the miners' strikes of 1972 and 1974 (as well as the consequent three-day week), and the slow death of the Keynesian postwar settlement.

There are two significant problems with reading Ballard's relationship with the context of the 1960s in this manner, however. First, as other contributors to this special issue have suggested, Ballard's account of technology in the concrete and steel books generally, and *Concrete Island* in particular, is more complex than a straightforwardly pessimistic reading suggests.[2] Second, the historiography of the UK's postwar military-industrial complex and programme of civilian technological development is considerably more complicated than declinist narratives – especially those of a culturalist kind, such as Wiener's – are generally prepared to acknowledge. As David Edgerton has demonstrated, the declinist account of the technological revolution in the 1960s has its origins in 'the ubiquity in the post-war years of the claim that Britain was an anti-militarist and anti-technological society' (2006: 5). However, Edgerton sees this claim as evidence not of the UK's military decline but, in fact, 'the success (and power) of the militaristic strands in British culture', which obscured themselves so effectively as to produce a situation in which the British state came to be considered anti-militarist (5). In his view, 'C.P. Snow's notion of the "two cultures" [...] was garbled, wrong-headed, but for all that [a] typical, technocratic, declinist anti-history of Britain' (5). Moreover, he considers the idea that the UK's 'programme of technocratic modernisation of the 1960s [...] ended in disillusion and failure' to be too simplistic: 'far from injecting for the first time a technological dimension into the British state, [the] Labour [Party] set about *redirecting* the state's massive technological effort' away from military research and development and into civilian projects as a way of revitalising the UK's industrial base (230, italics added). In this respect, 'white heat' represented 'an ending rather than a beginning' (264): it was more the reformation of a successful, secretive warfare state that had equipped Britain with nuclear weapons in the 1950s into a modern welfare state than it was a singular, failed attempt to 'technologise' a governmental machine run by gentlemen scholars proficient in legalese.

Edgerton's historical account does not mean that Tew's reading of Ballard's Englishness is in any fundamental way incorrect. After all, Tew's discussion is less concerned with Ballard's representation of technology and the British state than with treating Ballard's writing as a traumatic aftereffect of Britain's complex territorial imbrications as they, and the conceptualisation of English identity undergirding them, fractured and withered under the centripetal force of decolonisation. There also remains deep disagreement among historians as to the nature of the relationship between actual and relative decline in the context of the UK (see Dintenfass 1999 for an overview). Nonetheless, Edgerton's contentions raise the implication that the declinist thesis, whether articulated in cultural histories of England or economic histories of British industrialism, have sometimes obscured the continued development of the British state's military-industrial complex in the postwar period. And it entails that the relationship between the context of Britain's supposed technological revolution in the 1960s and

Ballard's writing generally, the concrete and steel cycle in particular and *Concrete Island* uniquely, needs more careful examination.

Key to this examination must be a discussion of technology's place in what Jake Huntley calls the 'synthetic landscape' of Ballard's fiction from the 1960s and early 1970s (2008: 31). Huntley argues that this landscape 'is not a topology produced through mathematics,' despite its abstract and geometric character, but rather 'a re-mapping of the external world by the internal, an unfolding of consciousness across the clinical space and beyond' (31). This would certainly position the concrete and steel cycle as a perpetuation of Ballard's desire to map 'inner space'. But there is no reason to suppose that inner space, as Ballard depicts it, is not mathematical, if we take mathematics in this critical context in its 'pure', Pythagorean sense, which is to say, as a form of knowledge that seeks to reveal truths about the world without equating its findings with their potential or actual applications. A mathematical 'unfolding of consciousness' would, in this context, represent a form of theoretical knowledge (*epistēmē*) which reveals truth to the subject rather than a form of practical knowledge (*technē*) which leads to the appearance of truth only by means of instrumentalisation.

This 'mathematical' understanding of inner space, I would like to suggest, gets us a little closer to Ballard's account of the relationship between subject and object, individual and landscape, and explains why some of his most influential appraisers have attributed such significance to the mobilisation of geometric and architectural language in his fiction from the 1960s and early 1970s (see Luckhurst 1997). However, the final analysis needs to take into account the importance of technology as a form of revelation or appearance in this process, and it is here that the nature of Ballard's relationship with the technological revolution can be identified. Having outlined Ballard's curious place in discussions about postwar British literature and postimperial English identity, what I want to suggest is that the synthetic landscapes for which he is most famous are in fact *not* the products of *epistēmē* but of *technē* in that they have been revealed through instrumental forms of knowledge. At the same time, I want to argue, these landscapes are not – or are *no longer* – instrumentalised in themselves, and, as such, represent a fantasy of technology *after* technicity. The most important early appearance of this fantasy occurs in the short story 'The Terminal Beach', published in 1964, shortly after Wilson's 'white heat' speech. And *Concrete Island* marks an important moment when a paradigmatic subject of the technological revolution is cast out of (or perhaps casts himself out of) a landscape characterised by technology after technicity, and enters another landscape that can be positioned as the latter's opposite, being marked fundamentally by the *practice* of technicity. Though represented in traumatic terms, the irruption at the beginning of the 1974 novel is in fact highly ambivalent, and this ambivalence – together with the complex interplay of the two forms of synthetic landscape represented in the text and Ballard's earlier exploration of the revelatory nature of technology in 'The Terminal Beach' – mark his work as both an unusual product of and sophisticated comment upon the historiography of Britain's technological revolution.

Synthetic Landscapes and Technology as Revelation

'The Terminal Beach' is amongst Ballard's most widely-read stories. Published in 1964 in a collection of the same name, it is easily positioned in the context of his preoccupation with psychological and environmental entropy in the disaster cycle of novels published in the early-to-mid 1960s. However, it is also worth emphasising how its representation of a former nuclear testing site anticipates the depiction of synthetic landscapes in the stories he would publish towards the end of that decade and the novels that appeared at the beginning of the 1970s – particularly *Crash*. In the story a man named Traven journeys to the tiny island of Eniwetok, once the site of nuclear weapons testing and now a 'minimal concrete city' dotted with palm trees but otherwise devoid of life (Ballard 2006a: 30). The synthetic nature of the landscape is heavily emphasised – one of the story's section titles is actually 'The Synthetic Landscape' (30) – and Ballard is keen to stress the artificial nature of the environments traversed by his protagonist. Traven sleeps initially in a 'ruined bunker', from which he can see 'abandoned [Boeing] Superfortresses lying among the palms beyond the perimeter of the emergency landing field' (30). The rest of the island is characterised by 'desolation and emptiness'; there are 'target basins set into its surface' as well as 'roadways, camera towers and isolated blockhouses' which form 'a continuous concrete cap upon the island, a functional, megalithic architecture as grey and minatory [...] as any of Assyria and Babylon' (32). Ballard emphasises that even the apparently natural features one would expect to find on an island – beaches for instance – are here made of concrete (34), and writes that 'the entire landscape of the island was synthetic, a man-made artefact with all the associations of a vast system of derelict concrete motorways' (31). He also leaves the reader in little doubt as to the tool that was utilised to make the atoll appear the way it does: 'The series of weapons tests,' he writes, 'had fused the sand in layers, and the pseudo-geological strata condensed the brief epochs, microseconds in duration, of thermonuclear time' (32). Even time has, by means of a nuclear explosion, been subordinated to a form of human agency, and now 'the wilderness of weapons aisles, towers and blockhouses rule[s] out any attempt to return [the island] to its natural state' (31).

In his haunting descriptions of the aftereffects of nuclear testing, Ballard seems to invite the reader to interpret 'The Terminal Beach' as a representation of apocalypse. This description is appropriate, however, not just because of the scale of the violence done to the landscape in subordinating it to humankind's technological will, but also because the term's biblical use points to its etymological root in the Greek word *apokálupsis* (ἀποκάλυψις), meaning 'to reveal' or 'to uncover'. This is significant because, in addition to destruction, a form of casting out from the world, nuclear military technology in 'The Terminal Beach' is also responsible for creation, a form of bringing forth into the world; in addition to concealing an old landscape, it has revealed or uncovered a new landscape. And the role of technology in revealing or bringing forth into the world raises the spectre of another commentator on the significance of the West's increasingly technologised societies in the postwar period. Martin Heidegger's lecture 'Die Frage nach der Technik', delivered at the Munich Technische Hoschule in 1955 and translated into

English in 1977 under the title 'The Question Concerning Technology' (Heidegger 1977), is probably the most influential philosophical account of technology written in the postwar period. It is, moreover, useful in understanding Ballard's representation of landscape in 'The Terminal Beach' for two reasons. First, it attributes a great deal of importance to *technē* as a form of revelation which makes truth appear in the world. And second, it is notable in using landscape as a metaphor for understanding the impact of modern technology on the individual subject and humankind more widely. Both of these aspects of Heidegger's essay are helpful for understanding Ballard's relationship with the technological revolution. However, while his writing echoes Heidegger's understanding of technological revelation, Ballard crucially challenges some of the latter's most fundamental anxieties over the technologised landscape, and it is in this respect that he provides such an interesting reflection on the literature of Britain's 'white heat' moment.

In his lecture, Heidegger is persistent in attributing to technology the capacity of revelation, to the extent that it brings things forth into the world (1977: 12). This revelatory function is not a question of its scale, nor of its modernity: in his essay he famously uses the example of a votive chalice to explain the process by which an object (as means) is made to appear in the world (as end), and argues that 'modern technology too is a means to an end,' the weather vane and radar station being similar in the fact of their instrumental value if not their complexity (5). What makes modern technology – or rather, the modern attitude towards technicity – different, is that it takes the form not of a bringing-forth, but of a 'challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted' (14). As the modern attitude towards technicity develops, '[e]verywhere everything is ordered to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering' (17). To illustrate his point, Heidegger uses the example of a hydroelectric plant on the River Rhine, which changes the river into a 'standing-reserve' (17) for the production of electricity and defines it entirely in terms of its utility. He then steps back to examine the wider consequences of this transformation of nature into a standing-reserve, asking rhetorically, 'the Rhine is still a river, is it not?' and answering, 'Perhaps. But how? In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry' (16). The landscape thus begins to change as it is perceived solely in terms of its utility relative to humankind, its status as standing-reserve, whether this takes the form of electricity or the pleasure of ticket-buying holidaymakers. Heidegger describes this mode of perception as a form of 'Enframing' which 'demands that nature be orderable as standing-reserve' and thus 'employ[s] exact physical science' in order to 'identif[y] through calculation' precisely what quantity of utility is available to be extracted from any given thing at any given time (23). The reason that this mode of perception is so dangerous is that it reduces humankind to little more than 'the orderer of the standing-reserve' and even raises the prospect that men and women themselves will 'be taken as standing-reserve,' something increasingly evident in the fact that '*nowhere does [humankind] any longer encounter [itself]*' (27, italics in original). The ultimate danger of the modern attitude towards technicity is therefore that it 'banishes' humankind into 'that kind of revealing which is an ordering', and '[w]hen this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing' (27).

There is, as far as I am aware, no evidence that Ballard read or knew of Heidegger's work. Nonetheless, Heidegger's discussion of modern technology connects in a number of interesting ways with Ballard's texts, whose synthetic landscapes reflect Heidegger's understanding of *technē* as a form of revealing but answer his concerns about nature as a standing-reserve with a provocative, ambivalent and numinous fantasy of technology after technicity. There can be little doubt that 'The Terminal Beach' attributes to technology a revelatory dimension which has its origins in the human capacity to deploy instrumental knowledge: this much is suggested by the lengthy descriptions of the atoll's synthetic landscape, formed initially by the preparations for the nuclear blasts and then, more completely, by the blasts themselves. However, it is also clear that Traven's presence on the island is not evidence of the particular kind of *entfremdung* or self-alienation which, according to Heidegger, characterises the modern attitude towards technicity. Rather, in apparent opposition to Heidegger's account of the relationship between the subject and the technologised landscape, Traven's journey to the island is precisely a consequence of his desire to locate, identify and encounter himself. This desire manifests in his rediscovery of the 'long-forgotten memory' of his birth 'on the beach at Dakar' (Ballard 2006a: 29) and, more obsessively, in his search for the ghosts of his wife and son, who were killed in a motor accident (32) and whose spectral forms he periodically encounters (36, 39, 45, 50), as if the blasted landscape of the island is actually bringing them into unconcealment once more. The sense that the island is able to bring into appearance more than the mere physical manifestation of the self is developed further when Traven examines his 'thin body in its frayed cotton garments', and finds that '[i]n the context of the surrounding terrain [...] even this collection of tatters seemed to possess a unique vitality' (32). At one point he gazes into an artificial lake and '[t]he reflection reveal[s] the watery image of gaunt shoulders and bearded face' (33); shortly afterwards, Ballard writes that Traven's 'emaciation, by stripping away the superfluities of the flesh, revealed an inner sinewy toughness, an economy and directness of movement' (33). The absence of a nominative pronoun to describe the figure revealed in the surface of the lake suggests that Traven is losing a particular understanding of himself, but the construction of revelation as a form of 'stripping away' hints at an hermeneutics of authenticity that might allow a new and perhaps truer kind of self-understanding to appear: once the 'superfluities' are gone, what will be revealed is a kind of essence.

Technology After Technicity

More importantly, rather than representing a standing-reserve, the synthetic landscape of the atoll appears to have no instrumental value whatsoever. Though it has been revealed by *technē*, it does not elicit in Traven or the reader the kind of 'Enframing' Heidegger bemoans, which demands that nature 'stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering'. In his essay Heidegger writes that 'whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object' (1977:17). The implication here is that modernity ultimately causes humankind to lose any understanding of nature as something that stands over us as object – an understanding that lies behind, for instance, Kant's accounts of the beautiful and the sublime (Kant [1791] 2001). But in this

passage Heidegger is more directly explaining why technological objects do not stand over or against us in the way that nature does. '[A]n airliner that stands on the runway,' he writes, 'is surely an object,' but 'it stands on the taxi strip only as standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to ensure the possibility of transportation' (1977: 17). 'The Terminal Beach' provides us with numerous images of aeroplanes (as does Ballard's writing generally), but, importantly, none of them will fly again: the Superfortresses mentioned earlier are found beyond the landing field, among the palms; later in the story, Traven discovers another landing field 'next to a dump, where a dozen B-29s l[ie] across one another like dead reptile birds' (Ballard 2006a: 33). The aeroplanes on the island have become part of a synthetic landscape devoid of standing-reserve – in fact, devoid of technicity, though *technē* was the basis of its appearance. The submarine pens Traven finds on his journeys around the island illustrate this dynamic nicely: 'now drained', the submarines having long since disappeared (39), what is left is a strange synthetic landscape in which technicity has been superseded and yet technology remains.

At a superficial level this fantasy appears in innumerable post-apocalyptic films of the second half of the twentieth century; what makes it characteristically Ballardian in 'The Terminal Beach' is that the landscape that embodies it is so insistently represented as an object of the protagonist's fascination. Ballard writes that 'apart from a few scientific workers, no one yet felt any wish to visit the former testing ground' (2006a: 31), yet the opposite is clearly the case for Traven, who has spent six gruelling months travelling across the Pacific to reach the island (33). There can therefore be little doubt of his profound interest in the landscape of Eniwetok, which, though 'profoundly depressing, an Auschwitz of the soul' (31), is also fascinating, enthralling, and even something to be desired. Of course, the idea that apocalypse might secretly have been the desire of the various participants of the Cold War does not belong exclusively to Ballard. It is what provides the last laugh in Stanley Kubrick's satirical film *Dr Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), released the same year as Ballard's story was published. The deeply irrational desire for nuclear apocalypse in apparently rational agents obviously appeals to what Jeannette Baxter (2009) has called Ballard's 'Surrealist imagination', largely because it is as antithetical to the liberal myths of rationalism and voluntarism as Dr Strangelove's Nazi salute, which Peter Sellers portrays as an unconscious tic that his character is barely capable of controlling. The important point, however, is that 'The Terminal Beach' is neither satirical nor chilling; it is surreal, haunting, but – if not quite utopian – then curiously optimistic, its hieratic tone bespeaking a form of rapture with the potential of technology to reveal new synthetic landscapes that paradoxically resist the form of instrumental reasoning by which they were uncovered.

The best example of this paradox lies in the representation of what are referred to as 'the blocks', whose strangeness is signalled by the curious way in which Ballard describes his protagonist's encounter with them:

> To grasp something of the vast number and oppressive size of the blocks, and their impact upon Traven, one must try to visualize sitting in the shade of one of these concrete monsters, or walking about in the centre of this enormous labyrinth

that extended across the central table of the island. There were two thousand of them, each a perfect cube 15 feet high, regularly spaced at ten-yard intervals. They were arranged in a series of tracts, each composed of two hundred blocks, inclined to one another and to the direction of the blast. They had weathered only slightly in the years since they were first built, and their gaunt profiles were like the cutting faces of a gigantic die-plate, devised to stamp out rectilinear volumes of air the size of a house. (Ballard 2006a: 37)

'The Terminal Beach' is characterised by an omniscient, heterodiegetic form of narration which, for the most part, is explicitly focalised through the protagonist. Here, however, no particular character focalises the description, and the effect is to confront the reader with a synthetic landscape of impossible regularity that could only have been produced by a human hand but whose purpose is unclear even to the apparently omniscient narrator, and which seems to resist any attempt to imagine how it might be, or even have been, instrumentalised. In parenthesis Traven muses to himself that 'if primitive man felt the need to assimilate events in the external world to his own psyche, 20th century man had reversed this process' (Ballard 2006a: 31). However, if the blocks represent an unfolding of Traven's consciousness across the external world, as Huntley's analysis suggests, it is clear that, under modern technological conditions, he has become a stranger to himself. Ballard writes that, while three of the sides of each block 'were smooth and unbroken', on 'the fourth, facing away from the blast, [...was] a narrow inspection door'. The purpose of the door – inspection – hints at a wider purpose for the blocks, but this *causa finalis* remains obscure. Consequently, Traven considers the doors 'particularly disturbing' (37), and yet this feature of the blocks appears to be in direct proportion to their ability to captivate, because only when 'he discovered the blocks [did] Traven realize [...] he would never leave the island' (36). In this respect they represent, more than anything else on Eniwetok, the exhilarating but discomfiting attraction of technology after technicity.

A Return to Technicity

The final image of 'The Terminal Beach' is of Traven waiting for the ghosts of his wife and son to speak to him while he stares at the body of 'a male Japanese of the professional classes' (Ballard 2006a: 47), which he has dragged to his bunker from the crevice where he found it so that it can guard the 'great blocks' like a 'dead archangel' while 'burning bombers f[a]ll through his dreams' (50). Like the blowout that carries Maitland through the crash barrier at the beginning of *Concrete Island* (Ballard 2008a: 7), this image represents the threshold between a landscape dominated by the instrumental reasoning of *technē* and another landscape characterised by a numinous fantasy of technology after technicity. It imagines a return to the military technology that made the synthetic landscape of the island possible in the first place, and to a moment – the detonation of the H-bomb – that marked that landscape's final revelation. It is important, however, that it is an imagined moment, a false memory of an apocalypse at which Traven was never present, but which marked the conditions of emergence of the fantasy

landscape he now occupies. This is where it differs with the opening of *Concrete Island*, because where Traven imagines a utopian point at which a technologised landscape is transformed into one marked by technology after technicity, Maitland experiences the point of reversal when he is ejected *from* the latter *into* the former.

Between these two moments in Ballard's career lie the years when, by conventional accounts, the British state's stillborn technological revolution confirmed the decline of a former global power and the continuing crisis of postimperial English identity. But the representation of technology in Ballard's work of this period suggests that his writing cannot be straightforwardly folded into this narrative. By the time that *Crash* is published, the fantasy landscape of Eniwetok – and the fantasy of technology after technicity that it embodies – has been transferred to England in a manner not unlike that of the government programme anticipated by Wilson's 'white heat' speech, which saw a state-coordinated military endeavour transformed into a civilian programme of technological modernisation. As we have seen, Britain was *not* about to be turned into a technological society in 1964, the year 'The Terminal Beach' was published: it was one already, with Wilson's speech at Scarborough the previous year marking merely a proposed redeployment of the massive military-industrial complex that, between 1952 and 1963, had made the UK a nuclear state. It is therefore significant that Traven discovers the post-apocalyptic landscape after the fact: by 1964, the British state's programme of nuclear weapons testing had largely come to an end as it committed to the H-bomb as the primary military mechanism for ensuring national security. This strategy had a paradoxical effect: as Edgerton writes, 'Over and above the connection with the abolition of conscription, the commitment to the H-bomb signalled the demilitarisation of Britain and its economy' (2006: 233). In other words, it was the apocalyptic power of the nuclear deterrent that permitted the warfare state to be transmuted by Wilson's government into a technocratic welfare state. When Wilson spoke of the 'munitions of peace' he spoke more truth than has generally been acknowledged, because the white heat that was to power his programme of civilian technological transformation came, ironically, from a nuclear detonation. And this logic – in which, rather than being vitiated by the redeployment of technological endeavour to civilian ends, military nuclear power is actually what *enables* such a redeployment – is visible in much of Ballard's writing during the 1960s. By the time Ballard wrote 'The Terminal Beach', nuclear military technology was already playing a significant role in structuring the technological imaginary of the British state, and I think that we can read not just 'The Terminal Beach' but much of Ballard's work in the first decade of his career as a sophisticated commentary on this imaginary, one particularly sensational manifestation of which ends the 1964 short story as Traven watches the explosion that produced the landscape he has travelled across the Pacific to inhabit.

How, then, are we to read the irruption at the beginning of *Concrete Island*? I noted at the start of this essay that, following the collision at the outset of the novel, Maitland's Jaguar is transformed from a technological fetish object into an assemblage of components that allows him to practise technicity and thus ensure his survival on the island. In the context of the discussion just staged, we might therefore suggest that, in its very uselessness, the car prior to collision can be positioned on a continuum with the

blocks in 'The Terminal Beach' and identified as an example of technology after technicity. It could be objected that the landscape of automobility *must* be characterised by technicity, since its highways and intersections are revealed by a practical knowledge aimed at facilitating transportation. But this objection overlooks the simple point that the stereotypically 'Ballardian' landscape of automobility that dominates *Crash* and appears at the very start of *Concrete Island* is, in fact, only ambivalently defined by this imperative. Ballard cursorily acknowledges at the outset of the later novel that Maitland began his journey at his office in Marylebone, and the guilt that the character feels 'in seeing his wife so soon after a week spent with [his mistress] Helen Fairfax' suggests that his never-reached destination is his marital home (Ballard 2008a: 9). Yet this focus on the instrumental value embodied by the landscape of automobility – that is, its capacity to enable rapid transit between two different points in space – is undercut by the strange, unsettling and vaguely supernal language of desire through which it is described. Inside the car, the prosaic imperatives of transportation are overpowered by an irrational compulsion with no apparent purpose, which Ballard characterises as 'some rogue gene, a strain of rashness' lying deep within his protagonist's consciousness (9).

This pathological language is, of course, familiar from *Crash*, whose opening pages notoriously characterise the landscape of automobility as an 'overlit realm ruled by violence and technology' populated by 'neurasthenic housewives […] excited schizophrenics […] manic-depressives […] luckless paranoids […] sadistic charge nurses […] lesbian supermarket manageresses […and] autistic children' (Ballard 2008b: 8, 7-8). But while the landscape Maitland passes through in his Jaguar might be similar, it is important to note that the actual titular space of *Concrete Island* – negotiated, like Eniwetok in 'The Terminal Beach', primarily on foot – is ultimately revealed to be quite different, and that the variance between these two spaces is indicated by the shift in the status of the car as it moves between them. Prior to its encounter with the island, Maitland's car remains much the same as those that populate *Crash*. But while the latter are subject to similar collisions as the Jaguar in the later novel, their status does not really change as they are transformed from sleek consumer items into wreckage, and, as such, I would tentatively argue that *Crash* has rather more to do with the landscape of 'The Terminal Beach' than it does with that of *Concrete Island*. In *Driving Spaces* Peter Merriman uses the influential spatial thinking of the anthropologist Marc Augé to argue that, contrary to the critical tendency to understand Ballardian space in terms of generic and affectless 'non-places' (Augé [1992] 1995), Ballard consciously '*place*[s] the marginal landscapes of Britain's motorway verges in distinctive ways' (Merriman 2007: 210). In this reading Merriman is supported by Andrzej Gasiorek, who asserts that *Concrete Island*'s 'zone of dereliction is not of the same ilk as the non-places discussed by Augé' (2005: 113). Yet this essay has advanced its argument on that basis that, while the motorway and its 'marginal' landscapes are closely related, they are critically distinct from one another. Indeed, my argument has been organised around the suggestion that, in order to 'place' the collision at the outset of *Concrete Island* historically as well as spatially, it is necessary to understand Maitland's violent transition between the carriageway and its grubby hinterland as a threshold moment that reflects in complicated ways on the technological imaginary of the period in which Ballard began to write. While interpretations of the

concrete and steel work conventionally position the automobile as a placeholder for the psychosexual pathologies of a postmodernity that was in the process of arriving, they are less likely to look backwards through Ballard's *oeuvre* beyond *The Atrocity Exhibition* in order to contextualise his representation of the car within its broader historical context. What this essay suggests is that by treating 'The Terminal Beach' as the beginning of a more than decade-long engagement with the hidden imaginary of Britain's technological revolution, the fetishism of *Crash* can be read as an example of a broader preoccupation within Ballard's writing with landscapes marked by technology after technicity.

The significance of *Concrete Island* lies in the emphatic way in which it brings this fantasy to a close. The novel thus certainly represents a threshold moment, but I would be loath to suggest that simply because of this, and because of its preoccupation with the practise of *technē* in a sordid, disaggregated environment of the kind that would reemerge in Ballard's subsequent novel, *High-Rise*, it necessarily sits comfortably alongside the tendency to position Britain's programme of technological modernisation as bound to fail. Given the influence of declinist accounts of postwar Britain, it should not be a surprise that Maitland has been read as an instance of traumatised Englishness, who is struggling to come to terms with the growing irrelevance of his national culture in a world in which the British Empire is slowly disappearing. However, Ballard's own complex biography, combined with the sophisticated way in which he represents the relationship between subjectivity, landscape and technology – not merely in *Concrete Island* itself, but in the short stories and novels leading up to it – calls for a slightly more nuanced analysis. Challenging the tendency to position Ballard as disconnected from the England in which he wrote virtually all of his fiction seems quite reasonable. And it is certainly credible to claim that the irruption at the outset of the novel anticipates the development of a landscape that was yet to come. But what I have suggested here is that Ballard's fiction of this period deserves to be read as a complex commentary on the relationship between, on one hand, an English cultural identity that may have been in crisis during the postwar period and, on the other, a British state that, despite this crisis, was consolidating itself as it developed its wartime military machinery into a programme of nuclear research which then provided the basis for a technological revolution in the civilian sphere. It is, after all, out of this complex set of historical circumstances that Ballard's early work emerged. And if *Concrete Island* represents a moment in which the author shifted focus away from the technological fantasies of 'white heat' and towards technicity as a practice – if it marks the moment when Ballard substituted a landscape marked by the practice of technicity for a landscape marked by technology after technicity – its status as a threshold novel invites us to look backwards to the recent past as much as forwards to a future yet to arrive. More generally, I hope to have established – as has this special issue in its entirety – that it is nearly always worth looking again at Ballard's fiction, in order to identify the complications and complexities that continue to place him among the most compelling of Britain's postwar writers.

Notes

[1] I would like to extend personal thanks to Christopher Beckett for his advice on this point.
[2] For further discussion of utopia and dystopia, see Sue Roberton's contribution to this special issue. For more on the technological dimensions of these terms in *Concrete Island*, see Craig Martin's contribution.

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