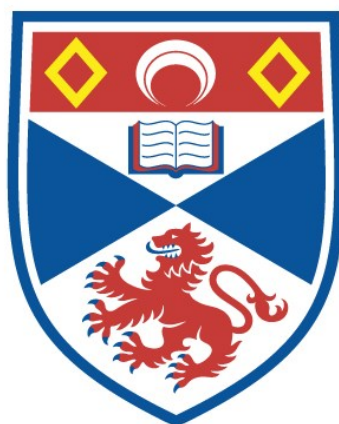


Dystopia and the divided kingdom: twenty-first century British dystopian fiction and the politics of dissensus

Adam Welstead

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis examines the ways in which contemporary writers have adopted the critical dystopian mode in order to radically deconstruct the socio-political conditions that preclude equality, inclusion and collective political appearance in twenty-first century Britain. The thesis performs theoretically-informed close readings of contemporary novels from authors J.G. Ballard, Maggie Gee, Sarah Hall and Rupert Thomson in its analysis, and argues that the speculative visions of *Kingdom Come* (2006), *The Flood* (2004), *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and *Divided Kingdom* (2005) are engaged with a wave of contemporary dystopian writing in which the destructive and divisive forms of consensus that are to be found within Britain's contemporary socio-political moment are identified and challenged. The thesis proposes that, in their politically-engaged extrapolations, contemporary British writers are engaged with specifically dystopian expressions of *dissensus*. Reflecting key theoretical and political nuances found in Jacques Rancière's concept of 'dissensus', I argue that the novels illustrate dissensual interventions within the imagined political space of British societies in which inequalities, oppressions and exclusions are endemic – often proceeding to present modest, 'minor' utopian arguments for more equal, heterogeneous and democratic possibilities in the process.

Contributing new, theoretically-inflected analysis of key speculative fictions from twenty-first century British writers, and locating their critiques within the literary, socio-political and theoretical contexts they are meaningfully engaged with, the thesis ultimately argues that in interrogating and reimagining the socio-political spaces of twenty-first century Britain, contemporary writers of dystopian fiction demonstrate literature working in its most dissensual, political and transformative mode.

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the University of St Andrews, and in particular to the School of English, for giving me the opportunity to undertake PhD study and for supporting me through the process in a number of ways. This study would not have been possible without the support of a University of St Andrews 600th Anniversary Fellowship (2013-2016) for which I am eternally grateful to the University and the School of English. I applied for doctoral study in hope more than expectation, due to my financial circumstances at the time – this fellowship award gave me the platform to gain so many valuable experiences and develop in ways I never imagined having the means to do, whether financially or intellectually. Thank you so much.

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you, and will always remember your support upon (I hope) looking back at a challenging set of times that I nonetheless made it through. Thank you so very much, Susan. Equally, I owe an enormous thanks to Dr Peter Mackay, who served as my secondary supervisor and effective mentor over the course of my PhD study. Our meetings each semester provided me with an invaluable source of guidance throughout my doctoral study, and I have appreciated your reassuring advice, sharing of experiences and confidence-inspiring supportiveness so much during that time. Thank you for being such an important presence for me throughout the writing of this thesis, and for always having been available to offer your time and advice when I needed it. My final academic thanks must go to the students I have had the privilege of teaching during my time at the University of St Andrews, whose enthusiasm and passion during tutorial meetings made teaching at the School of English the most memorable part of my time within academia.

It would be impossible to fully express the gratitude, acknowledgements and genuine thanks that are owed to my friends, colleagues and family for supporting and encouraging me over the years without producing a document longer than the thesis itself. With that in mind, I wish to thank all of my friends for having been there for me unconditionally during my PhD years – many of you are scattered across continents, however each of you has been a part of what has made this experience truly life-changing for me and however short or great the distance I feel immeasurably lucky to have each of you in my life. I owe a huge thanks to my wardennial colleagues and student supporters at St Salvator's Hall and Gannochy House, where I have had the honour of working alongside my studies, for having been such a positive presence in my life day-in, day-out, for the past five academic years. My family, and in particular my loving parents, are owed more thanks for everything they have done to support me than could ever be expressed here – as such, I intend to repay all of your love and support across the years ahead we have together.

Lastly, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of Patch Reynolds, whose passion for social justice, equality, solidarity, acceptance and kindness has inspired and shaped both my academic work and my life.

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Introduction

‘Literature, Dissensus and the Dystopian Imagination in Twenty-first Century Britain: Literary, Political and Critical Contexts’

In his influential study on the history, aesthetics and politics of dystopia in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (2000), Tom Moylan claims that ‘[t]he contemporary moment, therefore, is one in which a critical position is necessarily dystopian’ (Moylan 2000: 187). Postulated at the outset of the twenty-first century, Moylan’s argument both underlines the socio-political vigour of the ‘critical dystopias’ explored in his study and anticipates a wave of early twenty-first century dystopian writing that would follow, drawing ever closer the relationship between the dystopian imagination and cultural and political modes of critical expression.¹ Moylan’s interpretation of the contemporary moment is reflected across an array of postmillennial fictions that extrapolate on the radically negative potential of the late capitalist and neoliberal socio-economic consensus, of the prospective outcomes of domestic and foreign policy transformations in the wake of the ‘war on terror’, of the environmental future that the increasingly evident effects of climate change may be signalling, and of cyber-security threats or new technological means of mass surveillance – to name but a few of the most prominent thematic trends of the genre since the year 2000. The twenty-first century has not only seen the proliferation of the dystopian imagination

¹ In describing the ‘critical dystopia’, Moylan cites Lyman Tower Sargent’s reading of his work *Demand The Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986) and Tower Sargent’s description of the ‘critical dystopia’ in ‘The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited’ (Tower Sargent 1994: 9). Moylan describes the critical dystopia as ‘a textual mutation that self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the oppositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration’ (Moylan 2000: xv).

within the generic tradition of science fiction; dystopian modes of expression have become a more commonplace feature across literary fiction, contemporary film, critical theory, continental philosophy and within popular and political discourses.² Kazuo Ishiguro – who adopted the dystopian critique for the first time in his novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) – contextualises this predominance of dystopia within popular discourse and the aesthetic imaginaries of authors of literary fiction in his interview alongside Neil Gaiman, stating that:

I think it's interesting that the word 'dystopian' has become so popular now. There's something reassuring when I read that word, because it's saying it's some sort of dark, logical extension of the world that we know; it's going to be a commentary on our world. And so that fear of irrelevance isn't there (Gaiman and Ishiguro, 2015).³

Ishiguro's thoughts on the contemporary dystopia that is attuned to its present moment deserves scrutiny – as while set in the future, dystopian fiction, even in its earliest forms in the writing of authors such as H.G. Wells, Jack London, E.M. Forster and Yevgeny Zamyatin, has seldom evidenced the 'irrelevance' he alludes to, and is fundamentally engaged in

² Caroline Edwards, in 'Microtopias: the post-apocalyptic communities of Jim Crace's *The Pesthouse*' (2009), provides a useful overview of recent critical attention to a 'recent vogue for award-winning British literary authors to utilise generic elements borrowed from the SF "genre" tradition', with dystopian and post-apocalyptic modes of expression being the most commonly evidenced (Edwards 2009: 771; Edwards 2009: 784, esp. footnote 44). Edwards suggests that we might interpret this vogue as one that 'discloses an index of the escalating perceived likelihood of ecological disaster' (Edwards 2009: 771). Slavoj Žižek's works *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (2002) and *Living In the End Times* (2011) provide notable examples that convey the influence of dystopian and apocalyptic aesthetic discourses on critical theory, as Žižek's theoretical investigations build from the dystopian world of *The Matrix* (1999) in the former and provocatively claims that the 'global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point' in the latter (Žižek 2011: x). British comedian and influential columnist Frankie Boyle provides a useful example of dystopia's most commonly seen form within contemporary popular discourse and print media, used near-synonymously with 'Orwellian' to negatively describe the political present, or particular socio-cultural trajectories. More specifically, Boyle suggests in relation to the UK government's revised emergency austerity budget in 2015 on July 8th 2015 that 'dystopian sci-fi now only has to be set 18 months in the future', due to the stark social and political realities of austerity Britain: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/07/humanity-chancellor-emergency-budget-george-osborne-austerity> (Accessed 9th July 2015 at 10:46). A less satirical, but no less politically-charged example of the mark of dystopia on the socio-political imaginary can be evidenced in the World Economic Forum's 2012 World Risk Report, which presents analysis that seeks to discourage popular uprisings against economic austerity programmes and argues that a society that fails to tackle its fiscal imbalances and budget deficits is a 'society that continues to sow the seeds of dystopia' (Wilson and Swyngedouw: 4).

³ See Neil Gaiman and Kazuo Ishiguro (2015) "'Let's talk about genre": Neil Gaiman and Kazuo Ishiguro in conversation'. *New Statesman*. 4th June 2015. URL: <https://www.newstatesman.com/2015/05/neil-gaiman-kazuo-ishiguro-interview-literature-genre-machines-can-toil-they-can-t-imagine> (Accessed 17th August 2016 at 18:35)

critiques of its socio-cultural and political environments.⁴ Nevertheless, Ishiguro neatly reflects the essence of the later twentieth century ‘critical dystopias’ that, in Moylan’s study, are shown to offer ‘astute critiques of the order of things’ and present ‘oppositional spaces and possibilities’ in politically meaningful ways (Moylan 2000: xv). Ishiguro’s sketching of the generic characteristics of the contemporary dystopia is equally supported by Margaret Atwood’s contested categorisation of ‘speculative fiction’ as a generic form distinct from the worlds of fantasy and science fiction, and by Gregory Claeys’ claim that dystopias must be ‘broadly feasible’, without ‘utterly unrealistic features dominat[ing] the narrative’ (Atwood 2011/2012: 6-7; Claeys 2010: 109).⁵ In his later comprehensive study of the genre *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2017), Claeys concludes that ‘dystopia increasingly defines the spirit of our times’ and that its increasingly urgent task is to ‘warn us against and educate us about real-life dystopias’ (Claeys 2017: 498, 501). Claeys’s overview of the revitalised critical force of dystopian literature amidst the instability and precarity of twenty-first century economic, environmental and political crises suggests that, following Moylan’s claim at the outset of the century, the contemporary moment remains one in which the critical position is progressively dystopian.

⁴ Critical opinions differ regarding the earliest text we might consider ‘dystopian’, in the sense of the ‘simple dystopia’ that Darko Suvin differentiates from the ‘anti-utopia’ that is designed to ‘refute a currently proposed eutopia’, of which many pre-twentieth century examples exist (Suvin 2003:189). For example, M. Keith Booker states that ‘Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (1924) is often considered to be the first genuine modern dystopian text’, while Moylan claims that Forster’s *The Machine Stops* (1909) is ‘one of the first instances of dystopian narrative’ (Booker: 25; Moylan 2000:xv). H.G. Wells’s serialisation of the dystopian narrative *When the Sleeper Wakes*, later published in novel form as *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910), between 1898 and 1899 predates both Forster and Zamyatin’s early examples of the literary dystopia, as does Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1908), whose depiction of a society oppressed by state oligarchy renders it a fitting example of the Suvinian ‘simple dystopia’.

⁵ Atwood’s notion of the term ‘speculative fiction’ has notably been contested and debated by, and with, Ursula Le Guin. In her review of Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* (2009), Le Guin claims that Atwood’s term is an ‘arbitrarily restrictive definition’: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood> (Accessed 25/07/2017 at 11:24). In *In Other Worlds*, Atwood seeks to clarify her position, comparing her distinctions of ‘speculative fiction’ (narratives that descend from the tradition of Jules Verne, in which only ‘things that really could happen’ at the time of writing are central to the plot) and ‘science fiction’ (belonging to the tradition of Wells’s *The War of The Worlds* (1898), in which entities such as Martians feature) to Le Guin’s distinctions of ‘science fiction’ – closer to Atwood’s understanding of ‘speculative fiction’, she argues – and ‘fantasy’, which has more in common with Atwood’s description of a broad ‘science fiction’ (Atwood 2011/2012: 6-7).

Consensus, Dissensus and the Contemporary Moment: Theoretical and Political

Contexts

In *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2007), philosopher Simon Critchley provides an assessment of the early twenty-first century socio-political *zeitgeist* within which the dystopian narratives explored in this thesis were written and published:

[A]t this point in time, the political institutions of the Western democracies appear strangely demotivating. There is increased talk of democratic deficit, a feeling of the irrelevance of traditional electoral politics to the lives of citizens, [...] an uncoupling of civil society from the state [and a] motivational deficit at the heart of liberal democratic life (Critchley 2007/2012: 7).

Critchley's analysis argues for the ways in which such a motivational and democratic deficit often results in a dual threat: recent political examples suggest that depoliticised citizens within such democracies often become more susceptible to destructive behaviours and 'turning inward towards some reactionary and xenophobic conception of their purported identity', aiming misdirected anger, intimidation and violence minorities or the societal 'outsider'; equally, such socio-political conditions prove conducive to the functioning of an 'idyll of consensus' within which political life and opportunities for societal change are diminished (Critchley 2007/2012: 6, 129).⁶ The hegemonic consensus Critchley describes, in which genuine political participation, dissent and intervention is precluded by a depoliticising, consensual order, is one that has received much critical and theoretical scrutiny in the contemporary period. Japhy Wilson and Erik Swyngedouw, whose collection *The Post-Political and Its Discontents: Spaces of Depoliticisation, Spectres of Radical Politics* (2015) takes this 'post-political' idyll of consensus as its central subject, notably claim that one can identify the 'seeds of dystopia' within contemporary forms of

⁶ Critchley argues that this emergence of a worrying trend where 'populations of the well-fed West' turn to xenophobia and hatred of the Other – whether cast in the form of terrorist, immigrant, refugee or asylum seeker – is 'happening in a particularly frightening manner all across Europe at present' (Critchley 2007/2012: 7).

depoliticisation (Wilson and Swyngedouw: 5). They conclude that such depoliticisation presents the threats of an ‘erosion of democracy’ and the weakening of public and political spheres, and that a ‘consensual mode of governance has colonised, if not sutured, political space’ in the twenty-first century (Wilson and Swyngedouw: 5). It is within this contemporary political scene that this thesis locates contemporary dystopian critiques whose endeavours challenge or undermine socio-political forms of consensus – whether in terms of the specific forms of destructive consensus that enable democratic deficits, depoliticisation, societal inequalities and systemic injustices, or in terms of a broader interrogation of the post-political ‘idyll of consensus’ that political theorists and philosophers have identified as a key source of discontent within twenty-first century (neoliberal) societies. Within the malaise they identify, the dystopian imagination has flourished – providing a broad range of dissensual interventions on local and global political issues, and, in ‘critical dystopian’ form, continuing to demonstrate the rekindling of the ‘cold flame of critique’ Moylan identifies in late-twentieth century literary reactions to the conservative, capitalist economic and political consensus that formed the status quo following the influential administrations of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) either side of the Atlantic.⁷ Atwood equally suggests, adopting Bruce Sterling’s words, that speculative fictions – a generic boundary within which the critical dystopia belongs – constitute a ‘contemporary kind of writing which has set its face against consensus reality’ (Atwood 2011/2012: 7). While the dystopian tradition has commonly set its face against the ‘consensus realities’ of totalitarian regimes, oligarchical governments or advanced technological society, this thesis endeavours to demonstrate the ‘relevance’ and potency of the twenty-first century dystopian imagination

⁷ David Harvey’s work on the intrinsic importance of the ‘construction of consent’ to Thatcher and Reagan administrations in Chapter Two of *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) demonstrates that the consensual modes of governance and depoliticisation strategies that theorists such as Wilson and Swyngedouw identify within twenty-first century politics should be located within the longer history of neoliberalism, particularly in its acceleration during the 1980s (Harvey 2005/2007: 39-63).

by focusing its analysis on the close relationship between the dissensual nature of their critiques and the consensual elements of the socio-political contexts they interrogate.

Critical and political theorists such as Jacques Rancière and Chantal Mouffe, like Critchley, consider such forms of consensual governance to be at the heart of contemporary manifestations of the socio-economic and political consensus of neoliberal society. Rancière, a prominent contemporary voice in the fields of continental philosophy, political theory and aesthetics, notably places a redefinition of neoliberal consensus politics itself at the centre of his philosophical project in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1995). Rancière denies such a politics the name of politics, instead proposing to call it the ‘police’ or the ‘police order’ (*la police*). Rancière defines *la police* as ‘the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution’ (Rancière 1995/1999: 28). The governing logic or ‘regulatory framework’ of *la police* defines, for Rancière, the ‘allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying’ within political space, and maintains the prevailing order – or, ‘distribution of the sensible’ – of the body politic (Rancière 1995/1999: 29). Oliver Davis explains that underlying the regulatory framework of the Rancièrian police order is the assumption that society is a ‘whole of which all the parts are already known – already named and counted’ – underlying this assumption, however, is the reality that the police order’s distribution of the sensible and consensus reality does not name and count all political subjects, or ‘parts’ (Davis: 79). As such, the hierarchies, inequalities and exclusions that are created and maintained by the police and the consensual order are a fundamental preoccupation of Rancière’s key investigation of the connection between politics and equality. Importantly, he pointedly states that his use of the terms police and policing is ‘nonpejorative’ – meaning that *la police* and its organisational and distributive activities are an unavoidable feature of political society itself (Rancière 1995/1999: 29). As

Todd May's work in *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality* (2008) has demonstrated, however, Rancière's critiques of 'consensus democracy' represent a 'radical challenge to neoliberalism' and the neoliberal consensus politics in evidence amidst its socio-economic order, which lends a contemporary relevance and urgency to this central element of his political philosophy (May: 146). The policing frameworks entrenched in neoliberal societies ultimately result, for Rancière, in the reduction of political speech, action and participation to the 'idyll of consensus' referred to by Critchley in *Infinitely Demanding* – consequently, as Rancière argues in his essay 'Ten Theses on Politics', neoliberal consensus politics represents 'the end of politics' itself, in creating conditions of normalcy that preclude action that can truly be described as 'political' (Rancière 2010/2013: 43).⁸

Set against *la police* and its consensual order is Rancière's redefinition of 'politics' (*la politique*) and the 'political'. *La politique* occurs, for Rancière, when moments of political speech or action disrupt the consensus of *la police*, and, as Oliver Davis notes, when 'people who appear to be unequal are declared equal and the regulatory work of the police order is shown to be arbitrary' (Davis, 79). From this cornerstone of Rancièrian thought, where

⁸ Critchley equates this Rancièrian description of the reduction of the political to consensus, of *la politique* to *la police*, to that of Hannah Arendt's description of the 'reduction of the political to the social' in her work *The Human Condition* (1958/1998) (Critchley: 128). We might also find an important connection in Arendt's concept of the socio-political 'space of appearance' in *The Human Condition* – the space where, Arendt states, 'I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly' – and Rancière's conception of the 'distribution of the sensible' (Arendt 1958/1998: 199). Both conceptions emphasise the fundamental importance of political *appearance* – conferred by political speech and action for Arendt, and conferred by the police order's allocation and 'counting' of the constituent parts of its 'distribution of the sensible' for Rancière – within political space, which is an even more instructive philosophical grounding within the intensely visual nature of the public and political spheres of advanced technological societies. This grounding can be considered instructive and urgent in interpreting, for example, the perverse reclamation of 'political appearance' by terrorist groups for whom the visual spectacle of attacks to be photographed or captured and subsequently streamed across the screens of televisions, computers and smart phones is of vital importance; equally, and better reflecting the potential of Rancièrian theory, images or footage of the unequal or excluded 'outsider' of a given political space can, in moments of the 'political', change the prevailing discourse and consensus on who has the right to appear within a given space of appearance, to adopt Arendt's terms. A tentative example of such an instance might be located in Western media responses to the striking image of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh in an ambulance following an airstrike in Aleppo, Syria – which subsequently became a focal point in US and UK public discourse on refugees and on domestic budget allocations for humanitarian aid for a time – see Andrew Katz (2016) 'The Boy in the Ambulance'. *TIME*. August 18, 2016. URL: <http://time.com/4456905/aleppo-syria-boy-ambulance/> (Accessed May 18th 2018 at 18:37).

‘politics’ designates the occasion of a ‘political’ moment where the consensual order is challenged, and its hierarchies, inequalities and exclusions are shown to be arbitrary, Razmig Keucheyan deduces that ‘for Rancière politics and equality are one and the same thing’ (Keucheyan: 173). As a philosopher of equality, Rancière illustrates how those ‘with no part’ within the social order governed by *la police* – i.e. its ‘distribution of the sensible’ – come to challenge their exclusionary present and regain political appearance, effecting a ‘redistribution of the sensible’ within socio-political space (Keucheyan: 173). Deranty and Ross concur with Keucheyan’s point in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality* (2012), describing equality as ‘the guiding axiom of his thinking’ (Deranty and Ross: 1). In his essay ‘Rancière’s Utopian Politics’ (2012), Paul Patton underlines the political significance of Rancière’s understanding of politics and the police order, as in Rancièrian thought ‘politics is a matter of conflict over the very existence of this stage [i.e. the political stage comprised by legal and political institutions, public reason and public opinion] as well as the make-up and status of the performers who are entitled or able to appear’ (Patton: 129). These egalitarian ‘political’ moments, in which consensus is disrupted, ultimately constitute the weighty, vital term of Rancière’s that this thesis locates in the dystopian critiques of twenty-first century British writers: *dissensus*. A central argument of Rancière’s is that both aesthetics and politics constitute forms of ‘dissensus’. Rancièrian dissensus, as Corcoran elucidates, is:

not simply a reordering of the relations of power between existing groups; dissensus is not an institutional overturning [...] It is an activity that cuts across forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception (Rancière 2010/2013: 2).

This egalitarian, political ‘activity’ of dissensus, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, is one that can be frequently identified within the critical positions of twenty-first century dystopian fictions. Rancière’s idea of dissensus, and its radical potential to cut ‘across forms of cultural

and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres' is one that, I argue, echoes Moylan's rallying argument that dystopian literature can 'enable its writers and readers to find their way within – and sometimes against and beyond – the conditions that mask the very causes of the harsh realities in which they live' (Moylan 2000: xii). In this sense, the contemporary dystopian narratives that seek to interrogate the socio-cultural, or economic and political, forms of consensus that enable inequalities, exclusions and the depoliticisation of political space undertake the 'activity' of dissensus. The 'critical' dystopia, as such, is thus a generic form that provides a useful means of tracing the ground between the key strands of Rancière's recent philosophical work – in the aesthetics of politics and the politics of aesthetics; equally, adopting a Rancièrian interpretative framework provides, as I endeavour to demonstrate in this study, an insightful means through which to more incisively interpret the political nuances of twenty-first century dystopian narratives, in which destructive forms of consensus and insidious threats to our prospects for a more equal, heterogeneous and democratic future are commonplace.⁹

New Politics for the New Century: Political Critique and Postmillennial Britain

In her work *The Democratic Paradox* (2000), political theorist Chantal Mouffe claims that this broader context of neoliberal consensus politics is one that is firmly applicable to Britain at the outset of the twenty-first century. With reference to New Labour and Tony Blair, Mouffe examines contemporary forms of consensus democracy whose goal is, she claims, to negate the 'agonistic' elements of democratic politics – or, in other words, to transcend the

⁹ For Rancière's most dedicated examinations of the politics of aesthetics, here given less treatment than the aesthetics of politics, see Jacques Rancière (2000/2015) *The Politics of Aesthetics : The Distribution of the Sensible*. London : Bloomsbury, and Jacques Rancière(2006/2016) *The Politics of Literature*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Deranty and Ross's collection *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality* (2012) provides an insightful set of interdisciplinary perspectives on Rancièrian thought's influence on aesthetics across the arts, not limited to literature and film, which most commonly recur in his oeuvre.

traditionally conflict-laden elements of democratic practices in which a plurality of views and causes are contested (Mouffe 2000: 108).¹⁰ Mouffe criticises the ‘third way’ politics of New Labour that sought to bring social democracy and a neoliberal economic consensus together in order to evade the traditional ‘left’ and ‘right’ divisions of British politics and modernise it for the twenty-first century – an economic vision that was a constituent part of the ‘New Politics for the New Century’ Blair presented in a much-publicised Fabian Society pamphlet from 1998 (Mouffe 2000: 108).¹¹ According to Mouffe, New Labour’s ‘third way’ politics notably involved an elusion of the ‘language of redistribution’, an effective abandonment of the struggle for equality that had been central to the Labour Party’s socialist roots, and an ‘increasing acceptance of inequalities’ within contemporary British society (Mouffe 2000: 122-123). Mouffe’s assessment is consolidated by Matt Beech in his study *The Political Philosophy of New Labour* (2006). Beech states that ‘New Labour does not possess one, single cogent political philosophy [...] In places their philosophical commitments are ambiguous as with the principle of equality’, and he subsequently connects New Labour’s opaqueness on equality discourses to the broader political flexibility or adaptability that was fundamental to its strategic model of remaining in tune with public opinion and shifting political discourses (Beech: 212). Tom Moylan echoes Mouffe’s criticisms in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, in his location of critical dystopian visions within the context of neoliberalism and capitalism’s contemporary hegemonies and subsequently – supporting Mouffe’s connection of the socio-political malaise of neoliberal consensus politics to Britain under New Labour – in his loosely-veiled reproach of Blair and New Labour in his condemnation

¹⁰ For Mouffe’s later, more comprehensive treatment of ‘agonistics’ and the contemporary political scene, see Chantal Mouffe (2013) *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London: Verso.

¹¹ Blair and New Labour’s vision for a ‘third way’ politics notably developed alongside Anthony Giddens’s work on the ‘Third Way’ – see Anthony Giddens (1998) *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press. For Blair’s vision for New Labour’s ‘new politics for the new century’, see Tony Blair (1998) *The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century*. London: Fabian Society (Pamphlet 588).

of the ‘false “utopianism” of reformist promises from compromised social democrats with their bad-faith exercises in “third way” solutions’ (Moylan 2000: xv).

A key component of Blair’s ‘third way’ and ‘New Politics for the New Century’ was the marrying of key socio-economic policies and political strategies drawn from a Thatcher-led Conservative Party that had produced electoral success through the 1980s – including ‘go-getting individualism, moderate taxation, law and order, a strong defence’, as Robert Skidelsky summates – with the traditional social democratic values of the Labour Party (Skidelsky 2014: 359). Partially prompted by this Tory dominance of the 1980s, Blair and his supporters argued that this tradition of an ‘Old Labour’ nation defined, as Arthur Aughey argues, by a ‘working-class, trade union, socialist character’ required radical reform and a programme for ‘modernising’ the Labour Party’s socio-economic and political philosophies (Aughey: 96). This new era was most notably heralded by the slogan of the October 1994 Labour Party conference, ‘New Labour, New Britain’, a slogan that subsequently led to the coining of the party as ‘New Labour’, lasting from 1994-2010 under the leaderships of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. As Andrew Thorpe writes in *A History of the British Labour Party* (2015), Blair’s keynote speech at the 1994 conference was a major turning point in the history of the Labour Party. The speech firstly proclaimed the party leadership’s bold, promising socio-cultural vision for Britain ahead of the twenty-first century and, as Thorpe argues, saw Blair’s adoption of a political strategy employed by Thatcher in the late 1970s in ‘arguing for a moral change in British life, without specifying very far what such a change would comprise’ (Thorpe: 248). Secondly, Blair’s 1994 speech indicated to both the party and nation that the leadership were ‘preparing an assault’ on Clause IV of the party’s constitution in order to permit the modernisation of Labour’s manifesto with a greater focus on free market economic policies (Thorpe: 247-248). This indication was fulfilled in policy terms by a vote to amend Clause IV of the party’s constitution in March 1995, and developed through a

rhetorical and political shift intended to occupy a centre ground of British politics that New Labour felt to be key to future electoral success.¹² This thesis primarily defines ‘New Labour’ in historicist terms, as the Blair-led Labour Party that emerged from the political and ideological foundations laid in October 1994 through to the General Election of 2010 and the end of Gordon Brown’s premiership. In more philosophical terms, the thesis interprets New Labour’s political philosophy not simply as neo-Thatcherite or as a political project to implement the ‘third way’, but rather as the complex sum of its attempts to become a ‘modernised’ political party that could hybridise the best of Left and Right and adopt liberal, conservative and social democratic values and policies to reshape and occupy a fertile centre ground of British politics, in order to establish a versatile ‘New Politics’ and create a dynamic, but equally malleable, vision of a ‘New Britain’ in the public imagination. This political-philosophical understanding underpins my literary and theoretical analysis throughout the thesis, and particularly applies to the period 1994-2007, i.e. from the inception of New Labour through to the publication of Sarah Hall’s *The Carhullan Army*, which was the last of the four novels centrally examined by the thesis to be published.

In his conclusion within the comprehensive edited collection *Blair’s Britain 1997-2007* (2007), historian Anthony Seldon describes how despite resounding general election victories, the significant achievement of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and landmark investments in public services and the National Health Service following the lifting of the spending cap in 1999, much of Blair’s premiership was shadowed by unrest in relation to a number of key democratic and political issues, including: foreign policy and the military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq; criticisms of how the ‘rightward shift’ of the party (to

¹² Clause IV of the Labour Party’s constitution details the party’s commitment to securing ‘for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.’ (Adams: 144). As such, Clause IV has traditionally been the constitutional basis on which the ‘working-class, trade union, socialist character’ of the ‘Old Labour’, as described by Aughey, was built (Aughey: 96).

quote Thorpe's historicist analysis) reduced the government's focus on social inequality and exclusion; and scrutiny of the political impact of New Labour's relationship with the British press (Seldon: 645-646; Thorpe: 253).¹³ Following his analysis of the contemporary history of New Labour and the media, Robert Skidelsky argues that this relationship – particularly that which existed between the party leadership and media magnate Rupert Murdoch – was 'corrupt' and exacerbated a culture of political spin, and presents the striking conclusion that as a result 'New Labour failed to improve the quality of public life' of early twenty-first century Britain (Skidelsky: 403).¹⁴ In addition to exploring this charge of complicity in the 'spin' that has taken root in contemporary British politics, foreign policy under the Blair premiership and the broader political climate of early twenty-first century British politics, my contention is that the dystopian critiques of Gee, Thomson, Hall and Ballard explored in this thesis frequently focus on three key areas of critical scrutiny: in depoliticisation and its weakening of democratic life; systemic inequality; and in the social exclusion that political and sociological theorists have equally identified within the context of New Labour's Britain.

Depoliticisation, as Peter Burnham argues in 'New Labour and the Politics of Depoliticisation' (2001) was a fundamental governing strategy of New Labour, who adopted the process 'of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making' (Burnham: 136). The socio-economic form of depoliticisation that Burnham evidences in New Labour's political practice is subject, I argue, to a radical extrapolation in twenty-first century dystopian fictions, where the neoliberal economic logic of depoliticisation takes root within

¹³ In *A History of the British Labour Party* (2015), Thorpe outlines the further successes of New Labour – which include, he states: the introduction of the national minimum wage in April 1999; the working families' tax credit and increased levels of child benefit; and the low levels of unemployment, inflation and interest rates during the decade that followed the General Election of 1997 (Thorpe: 253, 259).

¹⁴ The culture of 'spin' and tarnished quality of public life referred to by Skidelsky has received much critical scrutiny within and outwith the academy. Peter Osborne's *The Rise of Political Lying* (2005) provides a particularly useful example of public and political attitudes towards this 'spin' culture in twenty-first century Britain, from chapter two on New Labour's ascent to power, to chapter four's specific analysis of Blair's narratives and strategies to chapter eight's focus on the role of spin and truth in discourses surrounding the Iraq war – see Peter Osborne (2005) *The Rise of Political Lying*, London: Simon & Schuster.

the broader political status quo of nightmarish versions of a future Britain. In such dystopias – with J.G. Ballard’s *Kingdom Come* and Rupert Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom* providing particularly fitting examples – the effects of depoliticisation transcend economic consensus and serve as a strategic means through which governments weaken democratic political space and, as a consequence, contribute to the ‘depoliticisation’ of citizens who are precluded the means of democratic participation and political subjectivity as a consequence. In those depoliticised spheres, as the central chapters of this thesis elucidate, societal inequalities and exclusions are rife – reflecting and embellishing upon the realities of a Britain where, at the turn of the millennium, ‘approximately 14 million people in Britain, or 25% of the population were objectively living in poverty’ (Pantazis, Gordon and Levitas: 1).¹⁵ This particular preoccupation of the twenty-first century dystopian imagination developed from the inequalities and exclusions of contemporary Britain that are the subject of much critical attention. In his study *Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Persists* (2010/2015), Danny Dorling concludes from his research on inequality, poverty and social exclusion in early twenty-first century Britain that it was a period of contemporary history in which ‘[d]esperair grew, greed spiralled, prejudice seeped in, more were excluded [and] the elite preached that there was no alternative’ (Dorling: 371). Exemplifying Mouffe and Beech’s aforementioned points on New Labour’s equivocations on language and discourses pertaining to equality, and arguably representing the neoliberal consensus that ‘there is no alternative’ – a phrase made famous by Thatcherism and the neoliberal economic reform agenda of the 1980s – Dorling argues, was Lord Peter Mandelson MP, who stated in a 1997 interview that New Labour were ‘seriously relaxed’ about the situation, and that ‘inequality was not a key issue for [the Party]’

¹⁵ These statistics are from the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (PSE), which Pantazis, Gordon and Levitas examine in their comprehensive study *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain: The Millennium Survey* (2006/2010). Pantazis, Gordon and Levitas begin their analysis by underlining the urgency of acknowledging that these statistics mean that ‘[a]t the turn of the millennium, there were more people living in or on the margins of poverty than at any time in British history’ (Pantazis, Gordon and Levitas: 1)

(Dorling: 370).¹⁶ Mandelson, subsequently elected to a Secretary of State role within Blair's cabinet, here illustrates a complacency that arguably sheds light on the 'ambiguities and contradictions in the [New Labour] strategy to tackle exclusion' identified by Ruth Levitas in her study *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour* (1998/2005) (Levitas 1998/2005: 234). Levitas's closing argument in her investigation is that the inequalities behind such exclusions, and increasing levels of poverty in Britain, would continue to worsen without a meaningful intervention in the status quo that protected neoliberal market values and political ends at the expense of social democratic values (Levitas 1998/2005: 228-234). In her work *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (2013), sociologist Imogen Tyler similarly argues that the inequalities and exclusions of contemporary Britain are a systemic consequence of neoliberalism, and its 'policies and practices that effect inequalities and fundamentally corrode democracy' (Tyler: 5). Tyler's work examines the political subjects who are excluded and made 'abject' by such systemic forms of exclusion, as Chapter Four of this thesis explores in greater depth, and argues that New Labour under the Blair premiership ultimately perpetuated a 'myth' that neoliberalism 'would effect a new market-driven egalitarianism' in twenty-first century Britain.¹⁷

In this concise overview of some key historical, political and sociological assessments of the negative elements of New Labour and the Blair administration's impact on British political life, we can evidence common ground with the dystopian fictions that are the central subjects of this thesis's core chapters – all of which were published between 2004 – 2007,

¹⁶ Richard Heffernan's study *New Labour and Thatcherism* (2000/2001) traces the legacy of Thatcherite politics and legislative reform within New Labour's development and implementation of its economic agenda following GE 1997. Heffernan suggests that the Thatcherite 'belief that there was no alternative to its vision of society' was influential on New Labour's development of both its plans for modernisation and a 'new' politics of the 'third way' (Heffernan: 171).

¹⁷ Tyler's theoretical and sociological perspective on New Labour's complicity in a damaging form of 'abjection within neoliberal Britain's socio-political discourses is arguably supported by Thorpe's historicist account of the internal party conflicts that occurred due to New Labour's perceived 'tendency to "demonize" disadvantaged groups, such as single mothers, asylum seekers and those on disability benefit' in *A History of the British Labour Party* (Thorpe: 264).

and within the context of a New Labour government. Several of the texts, as the central chapters explore in more detail, even create dystopian incarnations of flexible, media-savvy political leaders in President and Prime Ministers Bliss and Bare in Maggie Gee's *The Flood* (a satirical take on President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair), aspiring Prime Minister Michael Song in Rupert Thomson's *Divided Kingdom*, and in the leadership figure of the dystopian 'new politics' illustrated in Ballard's *Kingdom Come*, David Cruise. Beyond these allusive character portrayals, the imaginative interrogations of strategic depoliticisation, inequality and exclusions seen in the novels suggests that their dystopian critical position shares several of the key concerns of leading politically-oriented theoretical perspectives on early twenty-first century British politics, and that their speculative imaginations are very centrally grounded in the anxieties and discourses of their socio-cultural and political present. A notable precursor for these connections is to be found in Roger Luckhurst's article 'Cultural Governance, New Labour, and the British SF Boom' (2003). Luckhurst explores the resurgence of British science fiction in the 1990s, with particular attention to fictions – notably including James Lovegrove's dystopian novel *Untied Kingdom* (2003) – that followed New Labour's election to government in 1997. Luckhurst proceeds to trace a connection between the generic revitalisation of science fiction and the 'cultural governance' evident in New Labour's attempts to 'discipline culture to operate within a homogenized [...] sphere', and in the 'post-political' elements of its neoliberal governance (Luckhurst 2003: 435, 421). The close readings performed in the central chapters of this thesis builds on Luckhurst's insightful reading of the ways in which contemporary and twenty-first century speculative and dystopian fictions respond to their neoliberal political present, with particular attention to their dissensual interventions to the systemic and societal forms of consensus that enable social exclusion, inequality and the 'post-political' elements that the critical commentators and theorists cited in this section have identified.

Fragile Futures: Precarious Environments and Identities in the Twenty-First Century

Dystopian Imagination

In the introduction to their edited collection *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now* (2013) Siân Adisesiah and Rupert Hildyard explore how contemporary writers of literary fiction have undertaken a search ‘for new forms, tropes and theoretical strategies to envisage new horizons of possibility’ within the twenty-first century’s early years (Adisesiah and Hildyard: 1). Adisesiah and Hildyard later argue that this search for new horizons of possibility is ‘most evident in the dystopian fiction that is such a powerful strand of current writing’ (Adisesiah and Hildyard: 12). The dystopian energy of these twenty-first century critical trajectories mapped by Adisesiah, Hildyard and Boxall are perhaps unsurprising following an opening decade in which authors sought to respond to a variety of escalating crises, from the post-9/11 political climate and subsequent terror attacks – to take the focused context examined by this thesis alone – of 7th July 2005 in London and 30th June 2007 in Glasgow, to increasing evidence of melting ice caps and rising sea levels, to the global financial crisis that followed the collapse of the investment bank Lehman Brothers on 15th September 2008.¹⁸ In ‘Theses on Dystopia 2001’ sf theorist Darko Suvin claims that at the outset of the century ‘[a]ll of us on planet Earth live in highly endangered times’, and reflects the hitherto noted consensus of dystopian scholars Moylan and Claeys in suggesting that the imaginative and critical potential of dystopia is fundamental to our ability to navigate and

¹⁸ Martin Randall’s *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (2011) explores the key literary and aesthetic responses to the first of three twenty-first century contexts described here – see Martin Randall (2011) *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Astrid Bracke’s study *Climate Crisis and the 21st-Century British Novel* (2017) provides an insightful overview of this second context, with particular attention to the ecocritical responses of British writers to environmental crises in the twenty-first century context – see Astrid Bracke (2017) *Climate Crisis and the 21st-Century British Novel*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. Lastly, Katy Shaw’s *Crunch Lit* (2015) examines the body of literary fiction that followed the 2008 financial crisis – see Katy Shaw (2015) *Crunch Lit*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

overcome such precarious and unstable socio-political moments (Suvin 2003: 187). These critical assessments resonate within the dystopian visions of contemporary British authors, in whose writing we can evidence a shared set of preoccupations, anxieties and strategies for, in Adisesiah and Hildyard's words, envisaging 'new horizons of possibility' within the insecurities and potentialities presented by the twenty-first century's early years. Adisesiah and Hildyard's argument for the central importance of the dystopian imagination to the broader context of twenty-first century writing is supported by Peter Boxall in *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (2013). Boxall identifies an 'environmental dystopianism' – evidenced in the dystopian elements of contemporary fictions such as David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) – at the heart of a body of twenty-first century fictions through which, he claims, writers have sought to 'negotiate our being in the world' (Boxall: 217). Reflecting the 'environmental dystopianism' that Boxall places at the vanguard of postmillennial writing seeking to negotiate our place within the world, a number of British authors have, like Maggie Gee in *The Flood* (2004) and earlier in *The Ice People* (1998), vividly illustrated precarious environmental futures or continued to blur the generic boundaries between post-apocalyptic and dystopian fictions. Some of the most fitting examples here include Will Self's vision of the radical flooding of a distant Britain in *The Book of Dave: A Revelation of the Recent Past and the Distant Future* (2006), Jim Crace's illustration of the displaced waters, rain and landslides of a post-apocalyptic America in *The Pesthouse* (2007), and Sam Taylor's depiction of the last remaining flood survivors in *The Island at the End of the World* (2009). In each of these novels we can locate a sense of the 'global finitude' that Boxall identifies as a defining feature of early twenty-first century literature itself (Boxall: 221). This shared sense of finitude in twenty-first century writing, one that frequently manifests itself within the contemporary British

dystopian imagination as a more immediate precariousness, applies not only to eco-critical analyses of the UK's dependence on non-renewable natural resources and lack of meaningful action on climate change, but to the prospective consequences of a global financial crisis and to potential insecurities surrounding hard-won political settlements for peace, whether that of post-war Europe or of Northern Ireland following the Good Friday Agreement.¹⁹

Following his literary-historical examination of the twentieth century totalitarian dystopia and later twentieth and early-twenty first century 'post-totalitarian dystopia', Claeys contends that 'group identity remains at the core of the dystopian problematic' (Claeys 2017: 489). Alongside theoretically-informed examinations of the strikingly contemporary environmental and political critiques that dominate existing critical material on the four novels that are the focus of its central chapters, this thesis conducts close readings of twenty-first century texts with this twentieth century dystopian tradition of imagining groups, crowds and utopian or dystopian forms of socio-political belonging firmly in mind. Authors of early twentieth century dystopian literature frequently imagined disconnected societies, fervent crowds, and mindless mass populations in their work. These visions developed in reaction to both a literary legacy of utopian conceptions and a volatile European context, where dangerous utopian ideals had served as a foundation for nationalist propaganda, racist violence and brutal totalitarian regimes. Seminal dystopian texts such as H. G. Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) contribute most eminently to these radically negative illustrations. In *The Sleeper Awakes*, Graham, the Sleeper, is exposed to the ideological mechanisms behind utopian revolutionary rhetoric as Ostrog, the revolutionary tyrant, rouses the divided masses of a dystopian metropolis. Disempowered labourers are given arms to lay

¹⁹ For an account of the Good Friday Agreement and its context of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, see David McKittrick and David McVea's study *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict* (2000).

siege to the White Council's rule, and Graham becomes embroiled in the 'congested masses' of a 'struggling humanity' within London's mass urban cityscape of the year 2100 (Wells 1910/1930: 68). Wells's powerful chapter 'The Battle of the Darkness' conveys an unforgettable allegory, describing a calamitous human condition to come where, in rage and impotence, human beings destroy each other only for their revolution to produce conditions that alienate and oppress them even further. Similarly, Huxley's infamous novel *Brave New World* concludes with the image of a frenzied mob consuming John the Savage in their 'orgy-porgy' (Huxley 1932/1934: 305). Their hedonistic existence is a definitive depiction of the infantilising culture that Darko Suvin explores in 'Theses on Dystopia 2001'. Here, Suvin argues that it is late capitalism and mass culture's 'violence exercised upon the imaginary' that most significantly infantilises and depoliticises the individual in the twenty-first century context (Suvin 2003: 195). In Winston Smith's London, the collective mind of indoctrinated party members crushes and oppresses all shreds of individualism. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* thus skilfully expresses how suppressed subjectivity becomes fleetingly fulfilled in the mob mentality of routine hate sessions. Even Winston, a secret dissident of the Party, observes how 'a hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness [...] seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one's own will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic' (Orwell 1949/2003: 17). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s tale of Ingsoc's totalitarian regime has lived long in both literary and public imaginations for over half a century, representing the ultimate dystopian existence within a brutal state of suspicion, surveillance and terror.

Critiques of utopian literary experiments frequently take issue with the 'utopians' conceived in these Edenic worlds. In his essay 'The Politics of Utopia', Fredric Jameson argues for the inevitability of 'desubjectification' in the utopian political process, suggesting that the 'effect of anonymity and of depersonalization is a very fundamental part of what

utopia is and how it functions' (Jameson 2004: 40). Consequently, desubjectified 'utopians' ultimately prove to be as homogeneous as their dystopian counterparts. Despite the decline of such flawed instances of utopian thought in the twenty-first century, the dystopian imagination has continued to flourish, particularly in the speculative fictions of British writers such as J. G. Ballard, Sarah Hall, Sam Taylor and Rupert Thomson. In *Kingdom Come* (2006), Ballard portrays a Britain where a social and cultural malaise has led disempowered individuals, stirred by fear and anger, to engulf themselves in crowds. Through spectacle, intimidation and violence these masses exhibit, by night, features similar to the homogeneous masses of twentieth century dystopias. By day, many of them amble mindlessly through the Brooklands Metro-Centre, an infantilising consumerist nirvana where they escape both the quotidian boredom of suburban life and the disconnectedness of a depoliticised British society. In *The Carhullan Army* (2007), Sarah Hall imagines a brutally-administered Britain in the wake of economic and ecological disintegration. The novel's malcontent protagonist, a Sister, escapes from the regime of 'the Authority' in the hope of a better life amongst the dissident community at Carhullan. Despite the fanaticism of Carhullan's leader, Sister joins the sisterhood's revolutionary attempt to overthrow the Authority and liberate the people of Rith from their confined, monitored existence. Meanwhile, in *The Republic of Trees* (2005), Sam Taylor conceives of a utopian community formed in reaction to the 'cages' and restraints of the modern world:

At school, you learn to obey the numbers; you learn to see the bars of your cage. Of course they may be imaginary bars – the cage may be an illusion – but that does not mean you are not imprisoned by it. It is not what exists that matters, after all. It is what you believe exists. (Taylor 2005: 6)

Revolted by civilization's internal 'garrisons', as Freud conceives of them, Taylor's novel depicts a group of expatriate British youths who found a 'republic' in which Jean-Jacques

Rousseau is their idol and *The Social Contract* their sacred text.²⁰ A contemporary retelling of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), Taylor's *The Republic of Trees* similarly traces the thought that Utopia's doom has not been wholly due to flawed economic and political policies and actions, but rather to the destructive impulses and insatiable desires of a human nature that precludes such social harmony and cohesion. This idea is equally explored in Rupert Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* (2005), in which the British population has been split according to their divergent personality groups in a 'Civil Reorganization'. Charged with administrative responsibilities in his ministry position, Thomas Parry is one of the few who manages to see beyond the barriers of his quarter. Transcending the quartered boundaries of a divided Britain, Parry soon discovers that the homogenisation of space has resulted in the thorough homogenisation of society.

Similarly precarious political contexts and fractured communities are imagined across the dystopian visions of contemporary British writers, with notable contributions including the self-described 'grimly dystopian' world of Nea So Copros in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Lovegrove's aforementioned vision of an internationally isolated Britain in *Untied Kingdom* (2003), the skewed England of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Maureen Duffy's bleak extrapolations on the prospects of Scottish Independence in *In Times Like These* (2013), and Howard Jacobson's account of the government's opaque handling of 'what happened, if it happened' in *J* (2014) (Mitchell: 244). Postmillennial dystopian critiques such as those seen in Gee's *The Flood*, Hall's *The Carhullan Army*, Ballard's *Kingdom Come* and Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* consistently evidence Claeys's point that that visions of 'neo-liberal ideological assaults' now dominate the twenty-first century dystopian imagination in much the same way that visions of totalitarian rule dominated that of the twentieth century

²⁰ 'Civilization overcomes the dangerous aggressivity of the individual, by weakening him, disarming him and setting up an internal authority to watch over him, like a garrison in a conquered town' (Freud 1930/2004: 77).

(Claeys 2017: 489). In the narratives of these novels, I argue, quintessentially dystopian preoccupations with group identity are intimately tied to the radical ideological assaults that consolidate the control of political authorities that have developed as a consequence of contemporary forms of neoliberal governance. Strategies for depoliticisation or reducing the political to consensus, an abdication of duty for addressing societal inequalities and a systemic perpetuation of social exclusions feature across each of the four texts, and the influences of these recurring elements on group identities are examined in the core chapters of the thesis with particular attention to Gee's descriptions of the 'Last Days' sect in *The Flood*, the insidious identificatory rhetoric that keeps the 'official zones' of Rith in check in Hall's *The Carhullan Army*, the 'lonely crowds' and rioting mobs of Ballard's *Kingdom Come* and Thomson's reimagining of quasi-Orwellian forms of groupthink across Britain's four republics in *Divided Kingdom*.

The group identities depicted by contemporary writers of dystopian fiction also manifest themselves in response to varied crises of national and collective identities, whether in the form of a profound absence of such an identity, a radical excess of nationalist ideological rhetoric, or an ambiguity about the meaning of British or regional national identity amidst the dystopian state of the nation imagined across these texts. Along these lines, it is vital to locate these highly political literary critiques of group and national identities within the period of devolution and constitutional change relevant to the 1998 Scotland Act, Government of Wales Act and Northern Ireland Act, inclusive of the cultural change that both preceded and followed these legislative reforms. In *Nationalism, Devolution and the Challenge to the United Kingdom State* (2001), Arthur Aughey identifies New Labour's constitutional reforms as a fundamental factor in both a notable 'diminishing authority of the old institutions' and an emerging reassessment of the meaning of 'the national' in the United Kingdom following devolution (Aughey: 157). Tom Nairn's work in *After Britain: New*

Labour and the Return of Scotland (2000) charts this uncertainty of the ‘national’ within the context of New Labour’s early years of government, noting how ‘the “national” now so prominent in Tony Blair’s orations had to continue to mean “British” following the cultural change brought about by devolution (Nairn 2000: 39).²¹ The stark illustrations of the early twenty-first century dystopian novels explored in the thesis are, as I claim throughout the thesis, keenly attuned to such political debates and socio-cultural change. Their illustrations of the potentially fragile future of Britain’s political unions, reflected in the first part of the title of the thesis, ‘Dystopia and the Divided Kingdom’, are equally engaged with the mood of the public and media that was of such vital interest to Blair and New Labour. These moods on devolution is accounted for by Michael Gardiner, who writes that ‘devolution has been oddly viewed as a kind of betrayal by much of the British liberal press’, with contemporary responses from the political right often characterised by ‘elegies for Britain, speaking of loss and break-up’ and descriptions of England as a ‘collapsed Britain’ (Gardiner 2004: 166). In *The Cultural Roots of British Devolution* (2004), Gardiner argues that the cultural underpinnings of devolution that provoked political change have paved the way for a ‘post-British’ form of culture and cultural identity for communities now struggling to identify with, or rejecting, British identity.

In his later work *The Return of England in English Literature* (2012) Gardiner further examines ‘post-British civic thinking’ in relation to the representations of England that have emerged following constitutional change and devolution, with particular reference to Tom Nairn’s concept of ‘post-British citizenship’ in his aforementioned work *After Britain* (Gardiner 2012: 79). These theoretical interpretations of the ‘post-British’ speak not to the

²¹ Further evidence of New Labour’s efforts to negotiate this sense of the ‘national’ within the heated discourses of devolution Britain can be found in Gordon Brown and Douglas Alexander’s slogan of ‘New Scotland, New Britain’ ahead of the May 1999 Scottish elections, and their condemnation of the ‘narrow divisiveness’ of the SNP’s nationalist ‘identity politics’ (Hassan and Shaw: 93). The second chapter of Gerry Hassan and Eric Shaw’s *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland* (2012) provides a detailed assessment of these debates concerning the meaning of the ‘national’ in Scotland following the 1998 Scotland Act.

‘collapsed Britain’ elegised by right-wing press in the late twentieth and early twenty-first, harking to a ‘great’ Britannia that has lost its imperial might; rather they look to, as Gardiner’s analysis of Nairn’s work suggests, an idea of the ‘post-British’ that represents a form of democratic renewal, and presents possibilities for a theory of ‘sub-British nationhood without imperialism’ (Gardiner 2004: 156). Gardiner argues at the outset of *The Cultural Roots of British Devolution* that the ‘long cultural process behind today’s sovereignty-minded devolution is definitely postcolonial’ (Gardiner 2004: 1). These competing conceptions of devolution as a ‘collapse’ of imperial Great Britain and the post-British, postcolonial possibilities presented by devolution raise the question of what it means to describe twenty-first century ‘British’ dystopian fictions, and in particular to do so in analysing four dystopian novels by four English writers who often write about Britain using, in the novels selected, primarily English landscapes.²² Throughout the thesis I use the term ‘Britain’ and ‘British’ with these contextual discourses and an understanding of the instability of the term in mind. In charting the dystopian literary interrogations of New Labour’s ‘Britain’ at a time when, as Nairn highlights, New Labour and Blair were working to ensure that the ‘national’ and the ‘British’ were synonymous in the public and political spheres, use of the term ‘Britain’ provides a basis that is consistent with the concept of the ‘nation’ propounded by the political establishment that is frequently subject to critique in *The Flood*, *The Carhullan Army*, *Kingdom Come* and *Divided Kingdom* (Nairn 2000: 39). This consistency in terminology also provides the opportunity for my analysis to focus on the primary object of my critical attention, in the connection between the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘Britain’ that become

²² Rupert Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom* is the arguable exception to the rule here, as Thomas Parry travels a ‘long way north’ to a Green Quarter subject to blustery weather, which can reasonably be interpreted to represent Scotland – or, at very least, travels around four republics that formerly constituted a United Kingdom prior to the Civil Reorganisation (DK: 256).

increasingly strained following the constitutional reforms of 1998, with the dystopian visions of group or collective identities examined throughout the thesis.

Twenty-first Century British Dystopian Fiction and the Politics of Dissensus

This thesis locates the dystopian critiques of Maggie Gee's *The Flood*, Rupert Thomson's *Divided Kingdom*, Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* and J.G. Ballard's *Kingdom Come* within the hitherto explored political and literary contexts, and proceeds to make the case that a 'politics of dissensus' is the unifying force of their dystopian critical visions. Throughout the chapters that follow, I demonstrate the ways in which these contemporary writers adopt the dystopian critical position and engage in the fundamental 'activities' of Rancièrian dissensus. Challenging the hierarchies and hegemonies that seek to preclude equality, heterogeneity and social inclusion within contemporary Britain, I argue that these writers conceive of dystopian literary space as an imaginative site in which the socio-political space of twenty-first century Britain can be interrogated and transformed. The dissensual interventions evidenced within the novels, and in the authors' powerful dystopian critiques, represent a double-edged critique of consensus: in undermining the consensus democracy and neoliberal economic consensus that academic and literary voices have equally identified in early twenty-first century Britain under the government of New Labour; and in the forms of socio-cultural consensus that are complicit in the inequalities and exclusions of their present moment.

Chapter One of the thesis, 'Inequality and the Space of Appearance: Utopian and Dystopian Forms of Being-Together in Maggie Gee's *The Flood*', explores the utopian and dystopian forms of socio-political 'being-together' depicted in the dystopian Britain of Maggie Gee's post-apocalyptic novel *The Flood*. Adopting Hannah Arendt's philosophical

concept of ‘being-together’ within the political ‘space of appearance’, I locate *The Flood*’s radically divergent visions of social inequalities and connectedness within the dystopian literary tradition and within the framework of critical theory and contemporary utopian studies (Arendt 1958/1998: 199). Set within the quasi-apocalyptic environmental setting of a Britain suffering the consequences rising sea levels, the novel both presents a critique of twenty-first century attitudes to climate change discourse and develops a vision of a ‘collective fetishistic disavowal’ that extends to the shunned issues of systemic inequalities and exclusions within a deeply divided society (Žižek 2011: x-xi). This disavowal stems, I argue, from a broader sterility of the political imagination in the novel, and an eloquently illustrated vision of subtly depoliticised individuals who feel they cannot effect meaningful change within their social and political environments. The chapter proceeds to investigate how both systemic inequalities and socio-cultural intolerance of difference and heterogeneity result in ‘dystopian’ forms of being-together, as the disenfranchised dwellers of the impoverished Towers vividly illustrate an exacerbation of already-present societal divisions, and as the ‘One Way’ cult depicted in the novel preaches the divisive and dangerous ideological brand of rhetoric that presents a threat to Britain’s possibilities for a diverse, inclusive future. Gee gives a depth to her illustration by depicting the societal factors that render individuals of the cult – and, notably, of ‘the crowd’ – susceptible to fleeting forms of belonging within cults and crowds. With reference to crowd theory, I argue that crowds represent the dystopian intersubjectivity *par excellence* in the novel, as disempowered individuals participate in activities that ultimately continue to divide them even further from meaningful forms of socio-political belonging. The final section of chapter one explores the novel’s quasi-utopian vision of post-apocalyptic space at Kew Gardens. Within this microcosmic vision of a minor utopian ‘space of appearance’, I argue, Gee presents modest possibilities for radically better forms of ‘being-together’ – both in illustrating the flourishing

of heterogeneity and tolerance in the novel's 'After' section, and in the destruction, via an apocalyptic tidal wave, of the dystopian systemic structures that have caused social inequalities to endure within twenty-first century Britain.

In the second chapter of the thesis, “‘There is No Alternative’: Consensus, Resistance and the Politics of Precarity in Sarah Hall’s *The Carhullan Army*’, I explore *The Carhullan Army*’s vision of Britain in a state of economic, environmental and political insecurity. Echoing *Divided Kingdom*’s ‘Civil Rearrangement’, the novel illustrates a radical political restructuring of the United Kingdom in the face of emerging crises. At the heart of a new authoritarian socio-political order, I claim, is a radical dystopian inversion of the neoliberal Thatcherite dogma that ‘There is No Alternative’ (‘T.I.N.A.’). The dangerous state of depoliticisation and subjugation over which ‘The Authority’ presides is reliant on the British public’s acceptance of the consensus that, due to financial crises and threats to domestic security, the status quo is the only possible political *modus operandi*. Within this dystopian context, which the chapter evidences in close readings of Sister’s experiences of life in Rith, the Sisterhood’s establishment of a flawed ‘feminist ecotopia’ at Carhullan comes to represent a belying of the radically oppressive socio-economic and political consensus that seeks to preclude dissent and alternative visions for change (Robinson: 200). The chapter begins with an examination of Hall’s dystopian extrapolation of the possible consequences of the economic and environmental fragilities evident in twenty-first century Britain. Invoking the pastoral imagery Romantic poetry and the imperial imaginary of ‘Rule Britannia’, Hall illustrates a violent ‘Arcadian revenge’ within Cumbria’s Eden district, as the consequences of climate change are wreaked upon a northern England left vulnerable following decades of socio-political disavowal and unequal government investment. Systemic inequalities are also evident in the novel’s depiction of the Authority’s capitalisation on financial crisis to reinforce inequalities, as they designate ‘non-priority’

zones following the Civil Reorganisation and implement a radically dystopian economic austerity programme. Informed by Rebecca Bramall's work on the 'cultural politics of austerity' and Isabell Lorey's theoretical study of the 'precarization' that is increasingly evident within neoliberal society, I examine *The Carhullan Army*'s dystopian economic vision of Britain and consider Hall's subtle critiques of the neoliberal economic consensus. The second section of the chapter explores the ideological and biopolitical means through which the Authority coercively governs the novel's Britain, locating Hall's nuanced depictions within the context of contemporary British political history before interpreting *The Carhullan Army*'s illustration of biopolitical control through Rancièrian and Foucauldian theory. In the section, I investigate the ways in which the police order can be evidenced in Sister's Britain and in the novel's quasi-Orwellian representation of the insidious undermining of truth within political space, and, lastly, I examine the feminist elements of Hall's dystopian critique. The chapter proceeds to explore Sarah Hall's critical utopian vision of Carhullan, in which sustainable environmental alternatives are enacted and an alternative political space is reconstructed in reaction to the socio-political consensus that 'There is No Alternative'. Concurrently, I adopt Caroline Edwards's concept of the 'microtopia' in order to assess the ways in which Hall is engaged with discourses of utopian thought. In the chapter's final section, I propose that *The Carhullan Army*'s representation of Sister's 'speaking back' and reclamation of political appearance evidences a moment of Rancièrian dissensus. This 'speaking back', I claim, results in the reassertion of a female political subject within her prevailing 'distribution of the sensible' and a rejection of the destructive forms of consensus that exclude and oppress in Britain under the Authority.

The thesis's third central chapter, 'Depoliticisation and the Disunity of Consensus in J.G. Ballard's *Kingdom Come*', begins its analysis from Ballard's highly political interview commentaries on the socio-political condition of British society under New Labour. In his

interview with Jeannette Baxter, Ballard argues that there is a ‘vacuum’ at the heart of contemporary British identity and political life. This chapter connects Ballard’s political critiques to *Kingdom Come*’s literary representation of Ballard’s broader conception of the socio-cultural vacuum of twenty-first century Britain, and examines the novel’s critical dystopian vision of how violence and rioting, an emerging far-right nationalist movement and an infantilising consumer culture ultimately fill that vacuum. The chapter’s first section explores *Kingdom Come*’s strikingly dystopian vision of depoliticisation and an allusively-named ‘new politics’. A vital element of this depoliticising ‘new politics’ of *Kingdom Come* is to be seen in the narrative’s vision of how an insecurity surrounding national identity creates space for a divisive identity politics – one that swiftly leads to fascism and xenophobic violence in Brooklands, as our narrator Richard Pearson observes. Following an examination of the exclusionary ‘imagined community’ created by far-right nationalist ideologies in *Kingdom Come*, the chapter proceeds to explore the ways in which consumerism and spectacle are equally seen to fill the societal vacuum illustrated in the novel. Section two proposes that *Kingdom Come*’s vision is of a quasi-Debordian ‘society of the spectacle’, and argues – via Debord’s concept of the ‘lonely crowd’ in *The Society of the Spectacle* – for a connection between the two varieties of the Ballardian crowd evidenced in the novel. Both forms of the Ballardian crowd – the ‘ochlocratic’ crowds engaged in violence, rioting and intimidation of minorities, and the mindless, infantilised crowds that flow through the Metro-Centre – are shown to be the consequence of a socio-political sphere that ensures the depoliticisation and exclusion of individuals, who ultimately find fleeting forms of belonging in consumerism or violence in the novel. In the section’s theoretically-informed close reading of the Ballardian crowd, I examine existing critical work on the Ballardian crowd and argue that crowd violence ultimately represents a symbolic form of violence against the exclusions and inequalities of the dystopian political present in which individuals of the ‘lonely crowd’

finds themselves. In the chapter's final section, I interpret Ballard's literary examples of a Rancièrian form of the police order in *Kingdom Come*, where insidious forms of consensus perpetuate the divisions, oppressions and exclusions of society. Ballard's radical dystopian visions of depoliticisation and the police order, I argue, ultimately represent a dissensual intervention in the dangerous forms of consensus present in contemporary Britain.

In the fourth and final central chapter of the thesis, 'Divided We Stand, United We Fall: Homogeneity, Abjection and the Politics of Partition in Rupert Thomson's *Divided Kingdom*', I examine *Divided Kingdom*'s illustrations of the radically dystopian consequences of divisive and myopic forms of identification and exclusion within contemporary Britain. Echoing key themes that recur across the dystopian visions of Gee, Ballard and Hall, I close read the ways in which the 'Civil Rearrangement' described in the novel exacerbates pre-existing inequalities, destructive attitudes towards difference and otherness, and systemic injustices against the 'abject' outsiders of contemporary neoliberal society. The chapter begins with an analysis of the novel's narrative of how a widespread disillusionment with Britain's political establishment and a discernible 'democratic deficit' paved the way for a Civil Rearrangement that ultimately consolidates, rather than redresses, the socio-political divisions of a disunited kingdom. I then proceed to analyse *Divided Kingdom*'s exploration of the politics of partition that divides the nation – both physically, in the implementation of rigid borders between Britain's four republics, and in the ideological and psychological elements of the identity politics on which a dystopian political establishment depends. The prevailing order of the Britain Thomson imagines evidences the exclusion and 'abjection' of a group of nomadic social outcasts – the 'White People' – who are the subject of the chapter's second section. I connect *Divided Kingdom*'s literary depictions of the White People, who are subject to systemic violence and routine prejudices across the four republics, to contemporary discourses on the social exclusion of groups such

as asylum seekers, the poor and Gypsy and Traveller communities with particular reference to Imogen Tyler's aforementioned study *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. The chapter's final section makes a case for Thomson's subtle visions of a hope and possibility that is set against the novel's vivid illustrations of abjection and quasi-Orwellian visions of systemic violence. I propose that the hope and possibility presented in *Divided Kingdom* represents a 'politics of beginning' – via Hannah Arendt's concept of 'natality' and arguments for the importance of the human capacity to 'begin anew' – and close read key examples through which, I claim, *Divided Kingdom* explores the subtler forms of consensus that preclude socio-political participation and change within contemporary Britain (Arendt 1958/1998: 9).

Throughout these close readings of the dissensus evidenced in twenty-first century dystopian fictions, the relationship that exists between the dystopian critical position and the 'activity' of dissensus is traced. In these 'activities' evidenced within contemporary dystopian critiques – i.e. the revealing of the arbitrariness of the underlying logics of hegemonic consensus, and the 'redistribution of the sensible' that paves the way for new subjects and heterogeneous objects to appear within political space – I propose that we can understand 'dissensus' as something fundamental to the dystopian critical position, and as such, where that critical position is mobilised in order to imaginatively transform political space in to a space that is open for equality, heterogeneity and democratic participation, we can identify a specifically dystopian form of 'dissensus' that evidences a modest utopian impulse for societal improvement in action.

Chapter One

‘Inequality and the Space of Appearance: Utopian and Dystopian Forms of Being-Together in Maggie Gee’s *The Flood*’

In his exploration of the sense of ‘global finitude’ that pervades much of twenty-first century writing in *Twenty-First Century Fiction* (2013), Peter Boxall highlights the vital importance of dystopian fictions. The dystopian mode of critique, he argues, has offered contemporary authors a means not only of articulating this shared sense of global finitude, but also a means of meaningfully challenging their socio-political present and exploring alternative possibilities for change. Boxall states that:

The dystopian, in Atwood and McCarthy, tends towards the future as dead end, as the global death that is implicit in our planetary vision. But if the contemporary augurs of environmental apocalypse offer this version of the future, as the end result of contemporary global culture, there is also in these visions of planetary death a kind of bleak utopianism, a vision of another kind of future [...] which does not belong to the logic of the market place and which comes to us from elsewhere, from a world arranged according to a different paradigm [...] [T]he tendency of the contemporary novel to seek out new spatial and temporal forms lives on even here, in these bleak, end-state fictions (Boxall 221).

Few novels illustrate this convergence of the dystopian and utopian in twenty-first century writing as fittingly as Maggie Gee’s *The Flood* (2004). In line with Boxall’s claims, this chapter argues that *The Flood* is a key text in demonstrating the shared concerns of a wave of twenty-first century writing, and of the contemporary dystopian imagination evidenced in the work of the British writers examined in the thesis. The novel’s explorations of the precariousness of our environmental future in the absence of firm collective action to address climate change, of the societal inequalities that the neoliberal late capitalist consensus has perpetuated, and of the institutional and cultural forms of discrimination that result in social

exclusion each resonate with the contemporary dystopias examined in this thesis.²³ In Gee's highly political and satirical critiques of contemporary Britain, and in her critical dystopian interventions in the forms of consensus that underlie such social and political problems, this chapter identifies the activities of Rancièrian dissensus elucidated in the introduction of the thesis. *The Flood*, I argue, enacts these dissensual interventions in forms of consensus related to Britain's environmental, economic and socio-political future through an elucidation of radically different modes of 'being-together' in both the pre- and post-apocalyptic settings of the novel. Being-together, in the Arendtian sense, refers to the condition of human beings mutually engaged in speech and action in a public domain. Siobhan Kattago neatly summates that, for Arendt, 'being with others, the fact of human plurality, is the foundation of the human condition' (Kattago: 173). In *The Human Condition*, Arendt accounts for the 'special relationship between action and being together', particularly in terms of the ways in which power functions in this 'special relationship' (Arendt 1958/1998: 23). Power itself is a 'potentiality in being together' for Arendt, rather than an explicit force applied or strength possessed (Arendt 1958/1998: 201). Power can never belong to mob rule, or ochlocracy, which is a mere 'perverted form of "acting together"' (Arendt 1958/1998: 203). This distinction between the potentiality of collective action in being-together, as opposed to the crowd's fleeting form of 'acting together', is one that underlies this chapter's negotiation of Gee's insightful representations of crowds, marginalised malcontents, and a conscious, diverse collectivity.

Mine Özyurt Kiliç notes that in *The Flood*, as in her earlier novel *The Ice People* (1998), Gee 'portrays the prevailing conditions through the generic features of a near-future

²³ On this final point, *The Flood* connects with Gee's earlier novel *The White Family* (2002), which as Sarah Dillon and Caroline Edwards argue is the foundation of Gee's 'bold confrontation with Britain's ingrained institutional and cultural racism which was brought to light by the murder of Black British teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993' (Dillon and Edwards: 7).

dystopia, which enables her to investigate the social crisis in tandem with the environmental one' (Özyurt Kiliç: 101). The novel's dystopian, pre-apocalyptic setting depicts a waterlogged Britain where ecological demise has further exacerbated the unequal living conditions of the poor, the frivolity of the wealthy, and contributed to a disconnected and divided society. The depoliticising socio-cultural malaise and post-political impasse has gradually eroded hopes for social transformation in this 'drowned kingdom', and rendered radical change inconceivable (*TF*: 108). Yet, following the apocalyptic tidal waves that consume *The Flood*'s pre-apocalyptic world, Gee's characters are seen to exist harmoniously in London's Kew Gardens. There, the novel concludes with a quasi-utopian affirmation of the possibility of an unrealised mode of being-together, founded on virtues of heterogeneity, difference and acceptance. *The Flood* thus exhibits a '*post-traditional* utopian imagin[ar][y]', which Caroline Edwards describes as 'a mode of utopian thinking that is flexible, pluralized, heterogeneous and dialectical' as opposed to the 'programmatic blueprints' and 'static perfectionism' that characterised traditional utopian thought (Edwards 2011: 178, emphasis in original). Sarah Dillon claims that Edwards' exploration of the post-traditional utopian imaginary and 'minor' utopian possibilities 'foregrounds the ways in which contemporary novelists [...] are rejuvenating speculative fiction and using emerging cosmopolitan identities to reveal the possibilities and impossibilities of utopian writing in the twenty first century' (Dillon 2011: 16–17). Rejecting and transcending a mere dreamy utopian wishfulness, *The Flood* can thus be identified as engaging with urgent issues and debates of twenty-first century Britain, grappling with questions of systemic inequality and social change, and meaningfully interpreting the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the contemporary socio-political climate.

Living in the End Times

The global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point. Its ‘four riders of the apocalypse’ are comprised by the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system itself (problems with intellectual property; forthcoming struggles over raw materials, food and water) and the expansive growth of social divisions and exclusions. (Žižek 2011: x)

Slavoj Žižek’s prophetic announcement is echoed in the notable thematic rise of apocalypticism in twenty-first century literature, philosophy and film. In *Living in the End Times* (2011), Žižek sets out his analysis of how our social consciousness reacts to the concept and threat of apocalypse by re-appropriating Kübler-Ross’ five stages of grief as a critical framework. Žižek argues that these stages (of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance) can be discerned in the ways that our social consciousness ‘attempts to deal with the forthcoming apocalypse’ (Žižek 2011: xi). *The Flood* is most notable for its concern with the first of Žižek’s ‘four riders’, the contemporary ecological crisis, and the potential zero-point to which it may lead. Özyurt Kiliç has furthermore demonstrated that *The Flood*’s ‘dystopian energy’ provides a means for engagement with issues of present concern such as the third and fourth riders: social division, inequality and the imbalances of late capitalism itself (Özyurt Kiliç: 116). While we glimpse several of Kübler-Ross’s stages throughout *The Flood*’s narratives, the stage of denial in the face of impending apocalypse stands as the most prominent. As *The Flood*’s fanatical ‘Last Days’ sect continually reminds us, Gee’s characters are living in their own end times, with a complacent population unaware of the disastrous tsunami to come. Despite the glaring evidence of impending disaster and ecological destruction throughout the novel, many of Gee’s characters are unable to comprehend or accept the reality of their situation, exhibiting a condition that Žižek describes as a collective fetishistic disavowal: ‘we live in a state of collective fetishistic disavowal: we know very well that this [apocalypse] will happen at some point, but nevertheless cannot bring ourselves to really believe that it will’ (2011: x–xi) .

Following the minimal drop in the city's flood waters it is assumed by the novel's large cast of characters that the threat has subsided, and thus news of 'flood sickness', an emerging illness, can mean little to a population so desensitised to their failing ecosphere: 'it was just something new, in the bones of their heads, a new little swimmer, dim and featureless, struggling, quietly, to make some headway against their conviction that the floods were over' (*TF*, 263). This 'collective fetishistic disavowal' imaginatively conveys Jameson's claim that 'it seems easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism' (Jameson 2009: 50). As the prevalence of denial and the perpetuation of the respective endgames of late capitalism and neoliberalism in *The Flood* suggest, neither apocalypse nor radical social transformation can be conceived as realistic possibilities in Gee's speculative vision of a dystopian Britain. Nevertheless, in the time preceding the fatal tsunami, an imaginative fascination with apocalypse emerges. The teenage friends Lola and Gracie, for example, stare 'riveted for a moment, at a computer simulation of a tidal wave [...] tiny people struggled like ants [...] something big and important at last [...] something marvellous that would sweep them away [...] something massive, sexual, final' (*TF*: 57). The cathartic effect of witnessing the disaster as simulation leads to a denial of the reality of the impending event itself. Similarly, Davey Luck, a TV celebrity astronomer, reads the programme for the End of the World Spectacular, where 'the footage, his producer promised, would be stunning' (*TF*: 82). The sublime experience of the simulation mystifies the inherent warning of Davey's show, and the threat of apocalypse is deferred, having become abstract and unreal. In spite of the likelihood of a comet strike, which would provoke catastrophic tsunamis, precautions are not taken to safeguard lives and move people inland (*TF*: 283). The narrator informs us that '[n]o-one on the show seemed to care what was true', and everyone – from the over-excited producers of the broadcast to government authorities in the unnamed city – remain oblivious to the real

implications of the show's content, so consumed are they by the lure of the spectacular (*TF*: 83).

The staging of an extravagant Gala best expresses this prevalent condition of 'collective fetishistic disavowal' in *The Flood*. The ceremony, incidentally, marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of a 'pleasure zone' for tourists, recalling both the Pleasure Cities of Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes* and the hedonistic leisure centres of Huxley's *Brave New World* (*TF*: 149). The memory of the riots that followed the closure of the old city dock site has been slowly stifled by the distractions of these pleasure zones and, similarly, the Gala provides a means of distraction from present crises in the novel. Reflecting Žižek's claim that late capitalism's 'frantic mobilization conceals a more fundamental immobility', the Gala's bright lights, extravagant refreshments and whirring cameras all mask the underlying socio-political stasis of a dystopian existence (Žižek 2002: 7). To adopt Darko Suvin's terminology, the Gala's projected utopian 'horizon' (i.e. the happiness, wealth and ephemeral promise of its exotic cuisines, bright lights and glamour) veils the static 'locus' of the city's dystopian present (Suvin 2003: 191).²⁴ The lavishness of the event obscures the reality that this horizon's function is precisely to ensure that city's current situation is glossed over, as well as ignored in larger political terms. In this sense, the dystopian locus remains immobilised: in its crushing of any possible utopian hope for progressive socio-political change, the static locus constitutes a safeguard for the failing socio-political structures of Bliss's Britain and the inequality and social abjection they have enabled.

Weaving between sharp-witted perceptions of indelibly human peculiarities and an ominous foreshadowing of ecological and socio-political ruin, Gee deftly depicts the hollow frivolities of a society on the brink of collapse. As the country escalates its military conflicts

²⁴ In Thesis 11 of his 'Theses on Dystopia 2001', Suvin (2003: 191) defines the locus as 'the place of the agent who is moving', and the horizon as 'the Horizon toward which that agent is moving'.

elsewhere in the world, the feeling is that the war effort is ‘happening a long way off; nothing to depress the mood of the Gala’ (*TF*, 234). While home and foreign affairs crumble around them, chauffeured politicians arrive to the Gala in high spirits, and when all resources ought to be addressing flooding damage and dire living conditions, the Gala provides a glamorous platform for a wealthy upper class to indulge in their excesses. The narrator details how ‘[t]he crowd feels good; the crowd feels great’ as the affluent citizens dine from a wide choice of endangered species, engage in sexual flirtation and snort cocaine (*TF*: 250). The city’s iridescent lights, reflecting the empty utopian promise of the Gala’s charm, sell hope and happiness: ‘[s]igns flashed, gorgeous, over Victory Square [...] selling Hesperican sugars, fats, drugs, shows, sex, hopes, holidays’ (*TF*: 81). A lingering wishfulness and modest hope resounds through *The Flood*, from the wealthy to the poverty-stricken dwellers of the Towers; however the Gala’s crowds elect to fulfil their yearnings in the momentary euphoria of bright lights and spectacle, remaining fundamentally unhappy in a city that has ‘gorged on dreams’ (*TF*: 83). As Guy Debord’s conception of the ‘lonely crowd’ contends, in crowds ‘spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another’ (Debord 1967: 22). *The Flood* suggests throughout that the group feeling of such crowds is symptomatic of a fundamentally disconnected society.

In a rebellion from their society, the impressionable young girls Lola and Gracie, rather farcically, become anti-capitalists for a fortnight. The tragic hilarity of their dissidence emerges from their thoughtless subscription to the very pop-culture, materialism and decadence that they aim to protest against at the Gala. While their misapprehensions provide a continual source of comic relief in the novel, with Lola’s affirmation that school is ‘just another capitalist institution’ a particular highlight, Gee’s satirical skill equally suggests a subtle critique of fleeting radicalism’s vogue in the present day (*TF*: 98). Underlying their pseudo-rebellion is an insecurity, and a pervasive sense that they, both presently and in the

future, are incapable of making an impact on their society. Dressing up, they believe that ‘if they weren’t themselves, they could do anything’ (*TF*: 71). Gracie’s naïve wishfulness is evidently connected to her lack of genuine convictions. While she resents her mother Paula’s ‘carping’ in the domestic sphere, Gracie adopts her opinions in Paula’s absence and, as with several of *The Flood*’s central characters, this adoption of a univocal world view prevents and precludes the individual’s ability to conceive and create anew (*TF*: 53). Gracie’s discontents with the society around her are thus confined to ineffective dreams and desires, such as her wishful remark that capitalism does not exist amidst the starry skies (*TF*: 87). In truth, Lola and Gracie ‘didn’t want to worry about real things, the things they lived with every day’ (*TF*: 86). Like those flocking to the Gala, they seek hope, promise and distraction away from the pre-apocalyptic devastation that lies around them. Intensifying a condition of collective fetishistic disavowal, the Gala ‘will go on happening forever, a fluorescent stage where they gibber like monkeys, bare-arsed, helpless, and everyone sneers’ (*TF*: 264).

Dystopian Being-Together

The Gala’s implication accords with that of thesis twelve of Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*: ‘everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear’ (Debord 1995: 15). Characters such as Elroy and Lottie feel alive and exhilarated at the centre of such surroundings, revelling in their opportunity to ‘dress up and see and be seen’ (*TF*: 218, 233). The Gala’s sinister reproduction of the social and political conditions of *The Flood*’s Britain, its espousal of the superficial and spectacular, inevitably results in the disaffection of those who do not appear. Those who exist in the worst affected regions, dissenting populations without media resources to bring their voices to the public sphere, remain on the margins of society. Discontented individuals like Zoe protest in vain, as only ‘the people who the city

defines itself by' are heard, or more importantly, seen (*TF*: 235).²⁵ In section twenty-eight of *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt defines the 'space of appearance' as:

The space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly [...] to be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance. To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all. (Arendt 1958/1998: 199)

Arendt argues that the space of appearance 'disappears not only with the dispersal of men [...] but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves' (Arendt 1958/1998: 199). In *The Flood*'s dystopian, pre-apocalyptic setting, individuals *disappear* in the Arendtian sense: thought and action, the essential guarantors of 'appearance', are consistently undermined by the homogeneity of crowds, infantilising spectacles and a climate of fear within a depoliticised public sphere. Indeed the prevalence of homogeneity and the abolition of plurality, for Arendt, 'is always tantamount to the abolition of the public realm itself' (Arendt 1958/1998: 220). *The Flood* similarly suggests that the 'presence of others' no longer provides a reassurance of reality when meaningful activity has been replaced by meaningless appearance amongst disconnected individuals. Desires for a mode of being-together closer to Arendt's definition emerge throughout the novel, as Gee's characters yearn for a more inclusive, active community, where the individual's freedom to conceive and create anew fulfils the unrealised hopes of the novel's pre-apocalyptic world.

²⁵ Here, Gee's exploration of the role of a depoliticising, quasi-Debordian 'society of the spectacle' that perpetuates social exclusions and inequalities resonates with Ballard's depiction of the Metro-Centre's consumerist hyper-culture in *Kingdom Come*. Alongside their depictions of spectacular societies, both novels illustrate frenzied, mindless crowds, suggesting not only a development of the traditional crowds of early-mid twentieth century dystopias, but a connection between the depoliticising or infantilising elements of neoliberal late capitalist culture and 'the crowd' – see Chapter Three of this thesis for further development of this argument in relation to the Ballardian crowd as a Debordian 'lonely crowd'.

In that pre-apocalyptic world, however, conditions have steadily declined for the poor. As one inhabitant of the poverty-stricken Towers, Viola, tells her sister:

It's been horrible here [...] we couldn't get milk, or papers, or nothing. We, you know, bartered, some days, for food. That wasn't in the papers was it? The government did fuck all for us. And then they're surprised when there's a little bit of trouble (*TF*: 170).

In the midst of such inequality and neglect, Viola poses a question that resonates through Gee's depictions of a disconnected society: 'Who is this "our people" they're goin' on about?' (*TF*: 166). Her anger is directed at Bliss, whose rhetoric of 'our people', 'our history' and 'the momentous present' proliferates through radio broadcasts, newspaper headlines and televised public addresses (*TF*: 254). The 'Daily Mire' discards well-researched dossiers dealing with serious cases of sabotage and corruption, instead opting for sensationalist headlines such as 'Violent Riots' and 'Towers Mob Rule' (*TF*: 285, 170).²⁶ Social discontent festers and flourishes in the cramped quarters and over-populated dwellings of the city, which lie in contrast to the open spaces afforded to the wealthy. May observes this on her trip to the Towers, noting how 'the boat moved into more open spaces as it crossed a richer part of the city' (*TF*: 188). The condition of human relations is further reflected in the architecture and infrastructure of Gee's dystopian, alternative London, where all space is expedited and little room for change exists; 'every scrap of land has a building on it' and, as Davey remarks, 'nothing was separate anymore' (*TF*: 16, 90). The closed spaces of society and the urban city fuel the discontent of social and religious activists, who continue to protest in spite of seeming futility. These prevailing structures seem even to draw the discontent of a 'bored' galaxy that desires 'something different, something less myopic than the city dwellers' (*TF*: 261).

²⁶ Within the context of Gee's critiques of facile tabloid journalism and sensationalist headlines, we might reasonably speculate that the 'Daily Mire' referred to in *The Flood* is a thinly-veiled satirical caricature of the British tabloid newspaper *The Daily Mail*.

As an apocalyptic tsunami descends in *The Flood*, Gee presents an opposing set of images. Several of the novel's central characters cling to each other in their last moments, a final moment of togetherness before the end of the world. In contrast:

The crowd on the hill pushed on upwards, struggling, now, pushing, screaming, red and contorted, insects scrambling on top of each other, a mill of ants in its final terror, but till the wave comes they will fight to survive [...] and then the wave comes; then the wave comes. (*TF*: 316)

The wave annihilates the dystopian intersubjectivity *par excellence* represented in the novel: the crowd. Crowds surround the disorder and chaos of the metropolis throughout *The Flood*, with Gee's descriptions evoking powerful literary images, from the clamouring crowds of the Wellsian and Orwellian dystopias to the faceless masses that sweep the ruined London of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922).²⁷ Kilda's presence in the novel brings to light a compelling connection between *The Flood* and *The Waste Land*. In 'The Burial of the Dead' Eliot's clairvoyant, Madame Sosostriis, summons the card of the drowned Phoenician Sailor and foresees a cataclysmic end, as the narrator warns: '[f]ear death by water / I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring' (Eliot 1925/1999: 24). Kilda similarly shares her vision of a London consumed by an apocalyptic tsunami: 'I see a big wall of water [...] I do see, like, the end of the world' (*TF*: 301). Her prophecy of apocalypse envisions a demise of *The Flood*'s pre-apocalyptic world, a haunting illustration of the twenty-first century wasteland shaped by the contemporary socio-political and ecological concerns of Gee's readers. However, sharing Eliot's dark poetic imagination, images of 'death by water' are similarly seen to relieve mindless masses of a dystopian existence.

²⁷ *The Waste Land*'s narrator illustrates a vision of a sea of despondent masses in the following extract: 'Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, / A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, / And each man fixed his eyes before his feet' (Eliot, 1925/1999: lines 61–65).

Individuals are roused to action by the collective feeling of *The Flood*'s crowds, yet their energies are simply harnessed to form an uncritical mass mind – vividly evidenced in Gee's description of how '[t]he sun lit up faces, blank and identical, all turned submissively in one direction' (*TF*: 37). In the tumult of the crowd, individuals feel that they traverse the unfreedoms of those rigid horizons around them, as Elias Canetti remarks in *Crowds and Power* (1960):

In the crowd the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person ... he has a sense of relief, for the distances are removed which used to throw him back on himself and shut him in ... with the lifting of these burdens of distance he feels free. (Canetti 1960/1973: 19)

The unburdened individual Canetti describes bears a marked resemblance to Gee's character Dirk, who immerses himself in the mobs of the 'Last Days' sect. When Kilda, *The Flood*'s clairvoyant, suggests an alternative conception of the future from Bruno's, this greatly unsettles Dirk, who had 'never been able to imagine his future' (*TF*: 126). The Last Days sect provides him with answers: the 'One Truth' of Bruno's book relieves his anxiety concerning the indeterminacy of the future; its rigid dogmas stifle his frustrated homosexual desires; their crowd spectacles provide him with fleeting moments of closeness. The crowds of One Way protestors 'clone' themselves en masse surrounding the Gala, 'hungry for the enemy' (*TF*: 232). They thrive best here, in full sight of the superfluous display of wealth. Bruno and his zealous followers frequently set upon Victory Square. Here, his fervent, homogeneous crowds treble:

The crowd was doing well. Gathering. Breeding. From the distance, they all looked alike, turned towards the placards with their letters of blood [...] goodness was growing. Calm spread through him as he watched the crowd, more stick figures drawn in to join the others, moving slowly together, unstoppable. It reminded him of something they had once done at school, an experiment with magnets and iron filings [...] the tiny ants shuddered and shot into line. The will of the One: the One who was All (*TF*: 40).

While Bruno addresses the crowd and aggressively compels them to ‘Awake’, in truth the inherent message sanctioned is to submissively accept the millenarian, fundamentalist doctrines that he preaches (*TF*: 30). Bruno’s grasp on the crowd is firm: ‘his spiritual power lay over them like a net of white ice, leaving his disciples locked, synchronized, lost in a steely perfection of grace’ (*TF*: 124). Serge Moscovici argues in *The Age of the Crowd* (1981) that ‘the secret of the leader is that he embodies the idea for the mass and the mass for the idea [...] he exercises his power not by organising violence, which is always secondary, but by organising beliefs, which are primary’ (1981/1985: 122). As Bruno desperately seeks to demonstrate, the effective leader does not herald revolutionary violence, but instead champions a powerful utopian ideology that endures in the minds of its believers and solidifies their willingness to support the transformation (or destruction) of present socio-political conditions.

Central to the social unrest and consensus of disavowal in *The Flood*’s Britain is an unreliable leadership consolidating a dystopian political endgame. Bliss states that ‘we must have war, or there would never be peace’, and that ‘peace meant war’, chillingly Orwellian utterances which reveal the depth of rhetoric disguising the truth behind his regime’s foreign policy (*TF*: 78, 102). Government-influenced media outlets report of ‘liberated’ cities far away, fabricating and distorting significant events (*TF*: 78). Bliss’s fear-mongering urges citizens to stay near their TVs and radios in the event of an attack, to await government instruction as they deal with the enemy (*TF*: 287). According to Arendt, such an unreal climate of ideology and fear ‘has succeeded when people have lost contact with their fellow men as well as the reality around them; for together with these contacts, men lose the capacity of both experience and thought’ (Arendt 1953: 321). Refining a culture of fear and spectacle, Bliss’s regime thus alters the individual’s relationships to his/her fellow men and women,

and further, the individual's relation with reality. As Arendt argues, the consequent isolation effectively precludes meaningful thought, experience and action, resulting in the thorough depoliticisation of the individual. In the hope of exacerbating climates of fear and hatred, Bliss's warmongering administration announces to the public that they are 'unable to substantiate' reports of enemy sabotage (*TF*: 148). The government 'habitually denied its own rumours', a convention that posits a warped logic where denial functions by suggesting the truth of that which is denied (*TF*: 149). Bliss reflects with disdain on how Darius Blow, a dissenting minister, has yet to become 'enlightened' (*TF*: 37). His opposing views appear untenable in a political sphere where unthinking consensus is a favoured state of affairs. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s London, Gee's dystopian pre-apocalyptic vision adopts a 'Victory Square', where the Last Days followers gather and ferment a puritanical fervour reminiscent of Ingsoc hate sessions (*TF*: 30). Constant surveillance similarly safeguards the status quo: 'the drone of helicopters, chasing burglars, monitoring demonstrations, keeping an eye on the city's pleasures, making sure nothing gets out of hand' (*TF*: 287). Such monitoring and protection of prevailing conditions means that the 'myopic' city dwellers of Gee's dystopia, even in close proximity of crowds, remain fundamentally alienated from each other.

Kew Gardens: 'Utopian' Being-Together

On the stage of acceptance, Žižek remarks that 'after passing through [a] zero-point, the subject no longer perceives the situation as a threat, but as the chance of a new beginning' (Žižek 2011: xii). In *The Flood* this new beginning 'holds all time and places', and represents a future where human experience has been fundamentally altered following the zero-point of apocalypse (*TF*: 7). Mine Özyurt Kiliç argues that this radical alterity from present structures is embedded in the post-apocalyptic narrative structure of *The Flood*: '[i]n reversing the

order, starting with the end and ending with a new beginning, the text defies the linearity and transgresses the conventional understanding of time, as if to suggest a new order that will shatter the present system' (Özyurt Kiliç 2013: 122). At the core of *The Flood*'s quasi-utopian scene at Kew Gardens is a principle of possibility and difference, and a critique of social, cultural and political hegemonies that endorse homogeneity to preclude future alterity. Gee's vision eludes the pitfalls of traditional utopian construction, and shares the concerns that Ronald Bogue locates in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's influential text *What Is Philosophy?* (1991), namely that 'utopias are the antithesis of becoming, process and movement toward a future that is genuinely new and thus inherently unpredictable, defiant of any mapping' (Bogue 2011: 81). A resistance to similarly destructive, systematising worlds is played out in the contrast between Kilda's clairvoyance and the principles of Bruno's 'Last Days' sect. The 'One Way' – the sect's name for its dogmatic, fundamentalist narrative of life's journey – is disrupted by her premonition of a world where 'there's lots of different endings' (TF: 301). This realisation debunks Bruno's metaphysical monism in favour of the pluralistic understanding that foregrounds the basis of the better world to come, as Kilda describes:

It isn't, like, One Way, not at all. There are worlds that are all bright, like worlds of light, and a world of darkness, but it all, like, splits, it goes on and on, so there's lots of worlds, and pieces get shuffled ... It's doing it now. Every day, every moment (TF: 302).

Kilda's description of the world connects with those of Harold Segall's long-unfinished monograph. Harold eloquently echoes Mr Ramsay of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) in his search to find meaning and understanding through his theoretical work. Unlike Ramsay's work on metaphysics, Harold's book on time, simultaneity and connectedness finally proves to be a success and source of fulfilment for him. Despite her pessimism about the book, Lottie too is struck with a sense that 'the whole world was connected' (TF: 15).

Rather than imposing a set of margins upon our knowledge of temporal structures, Harold's theoretical endeavours primarily seek to offer a more profound and meaningful understanding of the human being's experience of the world. Similarly, for May (a character Gee revives from her 2002 novel *The White Family*) 'all of life seemed to come to a point' (*TF*: 12). She appears haunted by the past and occupies a lonely, widowed present for much of the novel, recalling her lost husband and musing upon the events that ruptured relationships in her family. This recurrent sense of interconnectedness, however, is not reduced to impotent wishfulness; rather than precluding the agency of Gee's central characters, the contemplation of a connected world actually confers upon them: inciting Kilda's rejection of dogmatic univocity, inspiring Harold's influential theory, and prompting May's journey to reconcile with her son Dirk.

The Flood's post-apocalyptic space of the heavenly realm of Kew Gardens is depicted as an idyllic setting, far removed from the decaying urban environment of Gee's pre-apocalyptic, alternative London. In an earlier visit, Lottie remarks how Kew Gardens 'left her unusually thoughtful' (*TF*: 133). Its open spaces, unlike the cramped and crumbling cityscape, are thus shown to stimulate thought and reflection in the novel's characters, validating Michel Foucault's considerations of the garden as 'heterotopia': 'The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world [...] the garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity' (Foucault 1986: 24–25). Foucault defines heterotopias as 'something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 1986: 24). The Kew Gardens of *The Flood* is a site of growth, flourishing and renewal, and its presence similarly invokes and challenges both its preceding dystopian society as well as the 'real sites' of present-day London. Even Moira Penny, the embittered academic and 'One Way' follower,

has a final vision where the bucolic space takes on a heterotopic and transformative character. Welcoming the tidal wave's destruction of the society she despises, she takes a final look towards the horizon and sees 'something other, outside the city, something surviving, a blueness, a greenness' (*TF*: 306). While the novel's post-apocalyptic space evidences a recovery of the natural world and a blissful community within a 'happy, universalizing' garden, it resists assimilation into either utopian or religious narratives; its modest 'principle of hope' is, as Marder and Vieira articulate, 'a hope detached from [the] divine or messianistic roots [of utopian thinking] and placed in the hitherto unforeseen possibilities of human togetherness' (Marder and Vieira 2012: x). Along these lines, Dillon demonstrates that while *The Flood* engages with the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition, it ultimately 'breaks with this tradition in its refusal of final judgement and in its intimation that justice remains to come' (Dillon 2007: 375). While the earthly paradise of *The Flood*'s 'After' section is suggestively Edenic, far from heralding the recovery of a lost paradise or prelapsarian garden, Gee's Kew Gardens is represented as a pointedly *post*-lapsarian setting. The inequalities, prejudices and failures that characterise the novel's pre-apocalyptic world provide a basis for the radical alterity of its post-apocalyptic space and thus *The Flood*, in Edwards' aforementioned terms, both resists traditional utopian thought (which tends towards stasis and the projection of a monolithic realisation of utopia) and revitalises the utopian impulse (understood as processual, heterogeneous and provisional) through its post-traditional utopian imaginary.

Consolidating Jameson's point that 'there are a variety of ways to reinvent utopia – at least in the first sense of the elimination of this or that "root of all evil"', the combination of Gee's pre-apocalyptic 'critical dystopia' and its subsequent post-apocalyptic, heterotopian space ultimately offers a minor utopian 'moment of possibility', and a modest reinvention of utopian thinking through an assault on those features of contemporary society that prove the

most destructive in an extrapolated near-future (Jameson 2004: 37; Edwards 2011: 185).²⁸ This interconnectedness of utopia and dystopia further supports Özyurt Kiliç's reading of Margaret Atwood's conception of 'ustopia' in *The Flood* (Özyurt Kiliç 2013: 126).²⁹ Gee does not depict 'utopians' as such; and even those characters who revelled in the destructive apocalyptic possibilities of an approaching ecocatastrophe endure. There is room for Bruno in *The Flood*'s earthly garden: in contrast to the inflexible religious narrative he supports, there is no 'final judgement' awaiting him in Kew Gardens, no eternal damnation or rewarded salvation. Bruno can repose in the sunlight, and while portrayed at a distance from the others, he is not alienated and can live amongst a heterogeneous collectivity with diverse beliefs and desires that has rejected the intolerance and fundamentalism of the 'Last Days' sect (*TF*: 323). Arguments for an eradication of the racist and homophobic undercurrents that mar contemporary society feature significantly in Maggie Gee's fictions, most centrally in *The White Family* (2002). Such a desire for pluralistic acceptance is fundamental to the hope that forms the basis of the 'here and now' utopianism of *The Flood*'s scene at Kew Gardens, as Gee has suggested: 'I want to return us to the real world [...] I want to say that heaven is here and now' (Özyurt Kiliç, 2013: 126).

Darko Suvin states that utopianism is 'an orientation toward a horizon of radically better forms of relationships among people' (Suvin 2003: 187). *The Flood*'s 'utopianism', in this sense, comes to light most compellingly in the interplay between Gee's radically opposing conceptions of being-together. This 'utopianism' is not constructed on a principle of perfection; rather, an acceptance of imperfection and diversity enables the microcosm of Kew Gardens to be a setting where 'all are welcome' (*TF*: 325). The apocalypse of the novel

²⁸ In *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Tom Moylan describes critical dystopias as 'texts that are emancipatory, militant, open and "critical"' as opposed to 'compensatory, resigned' and anti-critical (Moylan 2000: 188).

²⁹ For Atwood, 'ustopia' suggests that utopia and dystopia do not stand as polar opposites; they exist in a 'yin and yang pattern; within each utopia a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia' (Atwood 2011: 85).

brings about the end of a dystopian society, and in its place a redeeming post-apocalyptic world is founded upon values that form the basis of a new beginning and new modes of being-together. Kew Gardens effectively becomes a site where the discourses of utopia, dystopia and community are explored, challenged and conceived anew; a heterotopic space through which *The Flood* transcends both a wistful utopianism and a nihilistic dystopian pessimism for a more fulfilling critique that can accommodate both utopian and dystopian impulses in confronting the pressing socio-political issues facing twenty-first century Britain. Moreover, Gee's illustrations of disaffected individuals and tumultuous crowds are eerily prescient of the social unrest that emerged across Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century's second decade – most notably the London riots of 2011. *The Flood*'s attentive representations of the marginalised individuals that compose any crowd, however, further signal a shift away from what Kurt Vonnegut memorably referred to in his novel *Player Piano* as the 'homogenised pudding'; a vision of uniform, unthinking collectivity that animates the dystopian crowds imagined in novels such as *The Sleeper Awakes*, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Vonnegut 1952/1969: 171). Instead, *The Flood* rejects the unthinking consensus of Daily Mire-like sensationalism and provides a more insightful reading of the politics of social abjection and its disastrous consequences. Rather than a defeated depiction of an inevitable catastrophe to come, *The Flood*'s critical dystopian position suggests, as Davey remarks, that there are 'merely two worlds: one where it happens, where everything returns to nothing, and one where all of life goes on' (*TF*: 283). The novel thus presents two worlds of the future: one in which the ecological destruction of the present continues to be deferred by a 'collective fetishistic disavowal'; the other in which such problems are addressed with an appropriate urgency, and where the depoliticising tenets of neoliberalism and late capitalism are made obsolete.

The Flood points to the claim that more fulfilling modes of being-together can never be achieved through programmatic, ‘traditional’ utopian thought, and endorses Jameson’s suggestion that without challenging such flawed creations of ‘perfected’ communities, ‘our visions of alternative futures and utopian transformations remain politically and existentially inoperative, mere thought experiments and mental games without any visceral commitment’ (Jameson, 2004: 53). It is in this spirit that Deleuze and Guattari close their seminal text *What is Philosophy?* with the affirmation of a ‘people to come’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 218). As Bogue explains, the concept of a people to come rebukes the conventional image of utopian populaces, mere ‘aggregates that form an amorphous mass’, in favour of plurality and difference (Bogue 2011: 89). *The Flood*’s ‘people to come’ should therefore be understood as a heterogeneous utopian collectivity defined by divergent hopes and desires. Through this vision – which we might call the novel’s ‘post-traditional’ utopian imaginary – Gee further contributes to a discernible preoccupation with notions of utopian and dystopian modes of being-together in twenty-first century speculative fictions. In line with Bogue’s claim that ‘fiction promotes the thought of a people to come as something that [...] may assist us in our attempts to imagine, invent and enact alternative modes of existence’, *The Flood*’s hopeful post-apocalyptic vision poses a challenging set of questions and possibilities that we might well identify as literature working in its most potent and transformative form (Bogue 2011: 94).

Concluding Remarks

The dissensual interventions that this chapter evidences in *The Flood* have a number of significant connections with the novels examined by this thesis. The ‘drowned kingdom’ imagined by the novel connects with the Ballardian dystopian imagination, in Ballard’s influential depictions of environmental decline in the post-apocalyptic London of *The Drowned World* (1962) (*TF*: 108). Similar visions are evidenced in the deteriorating

landscapes of the waterlogged Blue Quarter of Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* and the violently eroding rural infrastructures that lie outside Rith in Hall's *The Carhullan Army*. The heterotopic, alternative space of Kew Gardens that lies in stark opposition to the unequal, decaying London of *The Flood*'s pre-apocalyptic world finds a compelling parallel in *The Carhullan Army*'s illustration of Carhullan as an environmentally responsible 'microtopia', and a seemingly more equal and democratic space than that of Rith and the 'official zones' of Britain following the Civil Reorganisation. In the hope and possibility presented by children such as Winston and Franklin in *The Flood* – a hope realised in the post-apocalyptic space at Kew Gardens – we can evidence a vital connection between Thomson's representation of the children who are free of the learned prejudice and 'psychological racism' that sustains the identificatory frameworks of the four republics in *Divided Kingdom*. This connection consolidates Beaumont's reading of the 'promissory politics of natality' that pervades much of Gee's fiction, and indeed of contemporary post-apocalyptic fictions more generally (Beaumont 2015:75).

Gee's literary interventions capture the 'activity' of dissensus evidenced both in the dystopian critique and post-apocalyptic, post-traditional utopian possibilities presented in the novel's 'After' section at Kew Gardens. Just as the heterogeneous, inclusive space of appearance depicted at Kew discloses a radical alternative for the 'here and now', in Gee's words, the activity of dissensus evident in both her dystopian satire and post-traditional utopian critique point to the 'utopian' politics that Paul Patton identifies in Rancièrian thought. As Patton states, Rancièrian 'politics' is a 'matter of conflict over the [...] make-up and status of the performers who are entitled or able to appear' within political space (Patton: 131). 'Politics', for Rancière, makes visible 'what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise' (Patton: 130). Gee, as Dillon and Edwards state, is 'often seen as a political writer' (Dillon and Edwards: 7). *The Flood*'s

vision of an egalitarian political space evidences a form of equality that is ‘expressed in collective action on the part of those excluded or discriminated against’, and suggests that if Gee is indeed a ‘political’ writer, she is a writer for whom the ‘political’ designates, in quasi-Rancièrian form, means of speech and action in which equality and inclusion are fundamental (Patton: 131). The activity of dissensus that intervenes in the regulatory logic of a political space that unequally names, as described above, one form of speech as ‘discourse’ and the other as ‘noise’ is evident through the narrative of *The Flood*, as the ‘noise’ of protestors outside the Gala, the rallies of the ‘Last Days’ sect and the unheard speech of the left-behind citizens of the Towers finally becomes discourse within the more equal space of appearance at Kew Gardens. As a result, *The Flood* stands as, I argue, the most optimistic of the novels explored in this thesis, diverging from the trend Gregory Claeys, in *Dystopia: A Natural History*, identifies within contemporary dystopian writing. Claeys claims that:

[Dystopian fictions] are often overly zealous in their insistence on the necessity for happy endings, imagining deviant rebels who beat the system, implausibly rescuing their central characters, and providing ‘hope’ in the persistence of utopian enclaves, the birth of children, and the like. This tendency, however, diminishes in recent decades with an increasing trend towards post-apocalyptic despair and away from ‘critical dystopia’ (Claeys 2017: 489).

Claeys’s point here arguably paints the ‘post-traditional’ utopian elements of Gee’s vision of post-apocalyptic space at Kew Gardens as well-worn tropes; Kew is a utopian enclave that survives the apocalyptic tidal wave that consumes a dystopian vision of London in the novel, and children such as Winston and Franklin represent a modest utopian hope for a more equal and inclusive future. The egalitarian and dissensual elements of Gee’s ‘political’ dystopian critique identified in this chapter, however, highlight the reductiveness of such a reading of *The Flood*, and underline the critical dystopian elements of a novel that, to quote Moylan’s definition, ‘self-reflexively takes on the present system and offers not only astute critiques of

the order of things but also explorations of the oppositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration' (Moylan 2000: xv).

Chapter Two

“‘There is No Alternative’: Consensus, Resistance and the Politics of Precarity in Sarah Hall’s *The Carhullan Army*’

Writing in her article ‘Survivor’s Tale’ (2007), Sarah Hall claims that ‘dystopian fiction must be part of a discussion of contemporary society, or the wringing of present jeopardy for future disaster’ if its speculations are to be taken seriously (Hall 2007b).³⁰ Arguably invoking the sentiment of Margaret Atwood’s much-debated definition of the cognitively estranging ‘speculative fiction’ that, in Bruce Sterling’s words, is a fundamentally ‘contemporary kind of writing which has set its face against consensus reality’, Hall’s statement points towards the gravity of the task at hand for contemporary writers of dystopian fiction seeking to partake in a discussion of twenty-first century society (Atwood 2011: 7).³¹ In *The Carhullan Army* (2007), Hall undertakes this task, depicting a near-future dystopian Britain in which the ‘consensus reality’ of contemporary Britain – and the forms of ‘consensus’ that constitute the realities of the present socio-economic and political moment – are interrogated. From Sister’s first-hand accounts of life in Cumbria, *The Carhullan Army* imagines how ‘the Authority’ has seized political control of a ‘third world’ Britain following a series of major economic, ecological and political crises (15). While the novel’s dystopian vision of Sister’s ‘brave new

³⁰ See Sarah Hall (2007) ‘Survivor’s Tale’. The Guardian (1 December) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/dec/01/featuresreviews.guardianreview16> (Accessed 25/07/2017 at 09:11).

³¹ For further context on the debate surrounding the term ‘speculative fiction’, see Ursula Le Guin’s review of Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and argument that it is an ‘arbitrarily restrictive definition’: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood> (Accessed 25/07/2017 at 11:24). For Suvin’s concept of ‘cognitive estrangement’, see p.13 of Darko Suvin (1979) *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

world' includes a diverse set of present jeopardies familiar to contemporary Britain – terrorist threats to domestic security, the dawning realities of climate change, scandals within the financial sector, a worsening housing crisis and the precarities that economic austerity policies can effect on the lower classes – it also evidences the strange (104; 121). This is a Britain where there 'are no human rights laws', a 'scene of ruin' and a 'place of desperation and despotism', where a nightmarish vision of a radical 'Civil Reorganisation' sees the representative democracy and civil liberties familiar to the contemporary reader regress under the tyrannical authoritarian rule of the Authority (185). Through physical and systemic violence, ideological coercion and biopolitical subjugation, the regime seeks to use its legislative and political power to eliminate resistance and, furthermore, to create a climate where all future societal alternatives are rendered inconceivable (196). In addition to the generic or literary-theoretical significance of the novel's illustration of a society in which socio-political visions of future change are rendered unimaginable, its significance within the political and historical contexts of contemporary Britain conveys the urgency and focus of Hall's dystopian critique. This urgency is evident in Hall's point, also from 'Survivor's Tale', that '[n]ightmares of a capital city overwhelmed by tsunami, war or plague transfix us, but catastrophe is first felt locally' (Hall 2007b). Hall's point here, written shortly following *The Carhullan Army*'s publication, both reflects a discernible trend of twenty-first century British dystopian fictions whose focus is decentred from the urban city and suggests that the novel's dystopian critique is as keenly attuned to interrogating the domestic and local issues of contemporary Britain as it is to the broader issues of international terrorism, geopolitical war and the future of neoliberal capitalist economics or global warming. The novel depicts an estranged connection between the global and the local, evidencing the quotidian effects of austerity politics on the citizens of a diminished and internationally isolated Britain while simultaneously alluding to a global financial crisis, international resource wars and

geopolitical conflicts. In the ‘local’ economic, environmental and democratic solutions practiced by the women of Carhullan Sister escapes Rith to join, however, we can locate a dissensual intervention in destructive forms of socio-political consensus in contemporary Britain, and a modest utopian set of alternatives that resist the maxim that ‘There is No Alternative’ to both neoliberal late capitalist economics, and to the present environmental jeopardies or socio-political insecurities of the present moment.

The first section of this chapter, ‘Austerity and Eden’s Arcadian Revenge’, explores *The Carhullan Army*’s radical vision of the economic and ecological fragilities of a dystopian Britain. Hall’s speculative extrapolations of contemporary threats to Britain’s economic and environmental security in the novel, I argue, depict an austere and environmentally frail nation that is antithetical to the vision of mighty, imperial ‘Britannia’ invoked at the novel’s outset. The chapter’s second section investigates the dystopian forms of political control depicted in the novel, in a theoretically-informed close-reading of Hall’s depiction of the Authority’s political rule of Britain through ideology, rhetoric and a dystopian form of ‘biopower’. The section reads *The Carhullan Army*’s exploration of ideology and national imaginaries as a literary vision informed by contemporary British political history and, equally, as an exploration whose urgency emerges from a concern – shared by contemporary writers of speculative fiction – regarding the potential for political administrations to circumvent constitutional protections and liberties in response to emerging threats from terrorist attacks, global financial crisis and geopolitical conflicts. The section proceeds to interrogate Hall’s portrayal of the Authority’s ruthless strategies of domination and coercion in Rith through Foucauldian theories of ‘biopower’, beginning from Foucault’s work in *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1977). This theoretical framework reveals the ways in which *The Carhullan Army* represents the strategies through which political subjectivity and socio-political transformation is precluded within a political space where a brutal revival of the

Thatcherite slogan that ‘There is No Alternative’ forms the prevailing hegemonic consensus, and, concurrently, reveals the ways in which the novel affirms the ability of heterogeneous political subjects to resist and transform such a political space. The third section of the chapter, “‘T.I.N.A.’ and Carhullan: Deconstructing Utopia, Reconstructing Political Space’, argues that the foundational principles that organise life at Carhullan constitute a political critique of, and reaction to, the depoliticising space of Rith imagined in the novel – belying the Authority’s implicit maxim that ‘There is No Alternative’ to radical austerity, environmental neglect and biopolitical domination. I demonstrate the ways in which Carhullan is at once an alternative space in which possibilities for radically better environmental and democratic political futures can be evidenced, despite the fundamentalism and militant coercions of Jackie’s authoritarian leadership that result in Carhullan ultimately being, as Iain Robinson has identified, a ‘flawed or failing utopia’ (Robinson, 201). The chapter’s final section claims that the novel’s depiction of Sister’s ‘speaking back’, and reclamation of political subjectivity, represents an act of dissensus. In this depiction of ‘speaking back’ as a dissensual intervention that evidences Sister’s reclamation of political subjectivity, I argue, the novel critiques political space governed by an exclusionary logic that obstructs the political appearance and action of unequal subjects; furthermore, I suggest that Hall’s dystopian dissensus expresses the political potential of dystopian literary space as a site in which present inequalities and future alternatives can be imagined and interrogated.

Austerity and Eden’s Arcadian Revenge: Economic and Environmental Fragilities

As Sister makes her way towards Carhullan at the novel’s outset, she passes through the eerie, deserted village of Vaughsteele, an abandoned settlement that vividly illustrates Britain’s socio-economic ruin following the crises and ‘troubles’ at the ‘turn of the century’ (21-22).

Hall's use of the term 'troubles' to describe the nation's socio-political regression here invokes the term's weighty significance within the contemporary political history of the United Kingdom, in its intimate associations with the Northern Ireland conflict (1968 – 1998) – an allusive description that, in its suggestion of the regression of the hard-won progress that led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, contributes to the quasi-entropic sense of decline that marks the novel's construction of a radically divided kingdom.³² Outwith the borders of an austere Rith lies a desolate landscape, an Eden district where the utopic charm of the Lake District imagined by Romanticism's Lake Poets now lies in ruin and destitution. While Hall estranges the familiar at the novel's opening by transposing the name Penrith to 'Rith', the district within which the town is situated retains its name. Creating both dystopian and quasi-utopian settings within the 'Eden' district, *The Carhullan Army* invokes discourses of utopia, biblical paradise and the legacy of the Lake Poets, all the while resisting explicit interrogation of such traditions – a subtlety that befits its dystopian vision of Britain where imaginaries of past and future have been dutifully eroded by the Authority's careful control of public information and the state of precarious imminency held in place by its draconian economic austerity programme.³³ Inside a vacant cottage in Vaughsteele, Sister observes that 'someone had written the words *Rule Britannia*' on the wall, and 'had tried to draw the Cross of St George but it looked distorted, bent out of shape' (22).³⁴ Britain, we learn, 'was now little more than a dependent colony', a struggling, isolated island that, as the cottage's graffiti might ironically suggest, starkly contrasts with the quasi-utopian imaginaries of nation and empire invoked by James Thomson's influential 1763 poem 'Rule Britannia' (36). Signifying either the sound and fury of futile dissent or delusional patriotism, the 'Rule Britannia'

³² A detailed analysis of the Troubles and the historical context of the Good Friday Agreement can be found in David McKittrick and David McVea's study *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict* (2000).

³³ The 'Lake Poets', Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834), Robert Southey (1774 – 1843) and William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850), are celebrated for Edenic, poetic visions of the Cumbrian Lake District.

³⁴ James Thomson (1763) 'Rule Britannia' (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45404/rule-britannia>).

scrawled on the wall at Vaughstele invokes the poem's vision of a mighty, imperial Britain that is home to mankind's loftiest ideals of liberty and justice. Thomson describes a nation of citizens who 'shalt flourish great and free', who 'haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame' – a hopeful and nostalgic vision of a nation that, in Sister's dystopian Britain, is living under the tyranny of an authoritarian rule where freedoms of movement, speech and reproduction have been firmly suppressed ('Rule Britannia': 9; 19).

The desolate Eden district through which Sister travels – a landscape over which the spectre of the Book of Genesis's paradisiacal setting is cast – is far cry from the blessed Britannia that, according to Thomson's poem, 'at heaven's command,/ Arose from out the azure main' (1-2). Narrating the recent history of a nation devoid of faith in anything beyond a dismal and strained hope for economic recovery, Sister passively notes the crumbling pillars of traditional faith, observing how 'church doors had been removed, probably to burn [...]' and stating that 'There was no point' in going inside (35). In addition to the novel's depiction of Britain's fall from heavenly isle to spiritually barren wasteland, the 'Blest isle! with matchless beauty crowned' glorified by 'Rule Britannia' has now succumbed to ecological decay and the worsening effects of climate change – a focus that sees the novel's invocation of the Book of Genesis eclipsed by the more eschatological spectre of the Book of Revelation (33). Echoing the rising sea levels and overflowing rivers imagined in contemporary British dystopias such as Gee's *The Flood*, Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* and Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2007), the novel's ecocritical critique primarily emerges from striking depictions of flooding crises. While *The Carhullan Army* diverges from the often London-centric focus of quasi-apocalyptic visions in modern and contemporary British speculative fictions, Sister does recount the disaster that struck the capital in the weeks preceding the 'collapse', describing how 'the Thames flood barrier had been overwhelmed and tidal water had filled the [Houses of Parliament]' (109-110). Here, Hall's vision shares that of Gee's *The Flood* in

that a political establishment complicit in the collective disavowal of the urgent demands of climate change is, somewhat ironically, swept away by the end product of the danger it sought to ignore. It appears that, even prior to the financial collapse and Civil Reorganisation, the government had neglected to address the worsening crises in ‘non priority’ areas such as Cumbria and, as Sister’s accounts convey, districts and villages were subsequently rendered unfit for habitation (22). Like the Thames, the river Eden’s rising levels now present an ominous threat to the region as a result of the failures of national and international environmental policies and practices, along with Westminster’s alleged unwillingness to invest in the region:

Below, the river Eden was brown and swollen and slipping past with frightening speed. In the half-dark I saw the bright movement of its edges, the backwash of white caps and whirlpools. It had broken its banks in the rains, spilling into the ditches and gardens on either side. I could hear the lower branches creaking as the trees along its sides were stripped of leaves (10).

We forded the streams and picked our way through the old settlements, past the abandoned cars, and over troughs cut out by flash floods [...] We crossed the swollen brown water of the Eden after the electrical grid had powered down and darkness was spreading over the town. The flooding was worse around the bridge (192).

Repeatedly noted to be brown from pollution, the distinctly un-Edenic river has gradually overwhelmed the region’s fragile infrastructures and technologies. The failing of its local estuary defences ultimately results in the flooding of homes (including Sister’s) and the power and speed of the flash floods was such that ‘whole sections had been pulled away’ from the roads that surround villages such as Vaughsteele, leading to their subsequent abandonment (24; 9).

The violence of the language employed by Hall in her descriptions of nature’s destruction of the Cumbrian landscape consolidates the language used in the above passages on the river Eden – for instance, the ‘stripped’ leaves of its surrounding foliage, its ‘broken’ banks and ‘frightening’ speed – is suggestive of an ‘Arcadian revenge’, where the natural

world exercises a retribution for the man-made destruction of its utopic pastoral wilderness. Building from Terry Gifford's argument that that a radical change in contemporary British attitudes to climate change means that we can no longer 'retreat to Arcadia', that 'now Arcadia has its revenge on us', Caroline Edwards considers the emergence of Arcadian revenge in the fiction of Sam Taylor (Edwards, 7; Gifford, 246). Edwards suggests that Taylor's fictional imaginings of Arcadia's nightmarish return can be located within a wave of contemporary speculative fictions, leading contemporary writers of speculative fiction to 'envisage a future in which humanity is wiped out: not necessarily by nuclear holocaust as was frequently portrayed in the "Golden Age" of science fiction in the 1950s, but by environmental catastrophe and climate change' (Edwards 2012: 7). The heritage of this Arcadian revenge's mode of apocalypticism lies, as Edwards argues, not in 'Golden Age' SF or contemporary 'blockbuster science fiction disaster movies' but in New Wave SF disaster fictions – in particular, the entropic visions of J.G. Ballard's early novels (Edwards 2012: 7). Reflecting the apocalyptic mood of Ballard's descriptions of a submerged London in *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Carhullan Army* envisions the disastrous impact of climate change on the Edenic landscapes of a Lake District that can, as a result, no longer be the idealised Arcadia to which we retreat. With shades of the devastating impact of the flood narrative of Genesis, floods and rain wreak havoc on a Britain where global warming has impacted the climate to the point where '[e]ven the rain is different now; erratic, violent' (6). Later in the novel, Sister describes how violent precipitation is now commonplace: 'then it started to rain like *murder*, a really bad flash rain, you know the kind we get now' (97; *Italics mine*).³⁵ The violent language of the landscape's Arcadian revenge is equally seen at Vaughsteele, where, recalling the automotive technologies and electrical grids ruined by flooding, Sister observes how the 'strange ivy creeper ran up the gables and onto roofs [...]

³⁵ The flood narrative of Genesis can be found in chapters 6-9.

TV aerials were *strangled* by it' and notes how '[r]ain had *eaten* at the bright paint' of disused cars parked in overgrown driveways (22, Italics mine; 20). Despite the stark and visible evidence of climate change's ferocious effects on Britain's environment, the novel intimates from its very opening that the nation has failed to rectify its neglectful industrial practices and rate of greenhouse gas emissions – with Sister describing the 'bacterial smell' and 'smog' from refineries and fuel plants that has left the population at Rith 'packed tightly together like fish in a smoking shed' (5). Through Sister's juxtaposition of nostalgic memories of Britain's cooler weather during her childhood and her illustration of the 'semi-tropics' that Britons were now accustomed to at the novel's outset, *The Carhullan Army* implicitly draws attention to the environmental practices and attitudes of twenty-first century Britain (6). Depicting an Arcadian revenge that purposefully invokes the legacies and visions of Genesis, the Book of Revelation, early fictions of Utopia, Romantic poetry and early-mid twentieth century science fictions of natural disaster and apocalypse, the novel's violent images of the natural world's quasi-entropic punishment and effective eviction of the human presence that has failed in its stewardship of its environment ultimately forms the basis of its ecocritical dissent. Hall's radical imagery of the brutal entropy of a fallen anti-Eden – or, Arcadia's retribution – furthermore ruptures the prevailing consensus surrounding climate change by both extrapolating upon the consequences of such consensus and, implicitly, calling for urgent action in our present context.

In addition to imagining the nightmarish perdition of Britain's environment, *The Carhullan Army* illustrates a vision of the economic state of the nation following a major financial crisis – a crisis that, as a result of the government's declaration of a state of emergency and implementation of a Civil Reorganisation, results in economic 'dependency', 'bankruptcy' and the introduction of a radical economic Austerity programme (119; 25). While the Authority reinforces the logic behind its brutal regulations and strict rationing of

all public goods through continual promulgation of rhetoric to assure the nation that its programme is the only path to economic recovery, Sister's accounts suggest that even those who were supportive of the Authority's ten year recovery plan had now quietly accepted that the promised recovery 'was becoming a hopeless myth' (9). The novel's descriptions of the Authority's economic policies consistently suggest that, on the contrary, the austerity programme and rhetoric of economic recovery simply function as a means of making practical political choices that consolidate the Authority's ever-expanding powers – an argument that Andrew, prior to the lapse of his resistance and dissent for the regime, acknowledges, stating that the 'ten-year recovery plan was just a contrivance to keep people in check' (26). While the Authority's careful regulation of information and news in regions such as Cumbria means that significant detail on other areas of Britain is sparse for much of the novel, it is clear that inequality of investment and the consequent under-funding of public services, industries and infrastructures are, in economic terms, the key practical political choices that the status quo serves in Rith. As Sister informs us, in recent years the British government consistently found the means to engage in 'rolling conflicts' abroad, yet simultaneously demonstrated a lack of 'will to invest' in rapidly declining domestic industries and public services (25). This, however, appears not to be the case for Rith and Cumbria exclusively; Rith is one of the government's 'non-priority venues', and a setting that is drastically divided from the 'other half of Britain' that appears to be estranged from the north of England, and the rigidly enforced zones of Rith (22; 15). Recalling Rupert Thomson's visions of the collapsed industrial heartlands of Iron Vale in *Divided Kingdom*, *The Carhullan Army* further alludes to the decline of northern England's former industrial strongholds, as Sister's description of the disrepair suggests:

Everything looked familiar, run-down and debilitated, still caught up in the failed mechanism of the recovery plan. Nothing seemed to have improved. The cyst-like meters hummed on the facades of buildings. Fetid rubbish was piled in open plots [...] We passed by the turbine factory. The gates were

locked, and a heavy chain sat between their bars. There was a notice secured to the post. *Closed until further notice* (193).

Sister's reflection on her experiences working in the New Fuel factory suggest that the neglect and devastation of northern industries has not simply been a by-product of the economic recession – in fact, the New Fuel factory itself was producing 'enough units to power the whole northern region' (53). The Authority, however, does not deploy the technology available to adequately resource the region, instead electing to wastefully stockpile the factory's output – most of which becomes defunct, aside from serving as material for the Authority's propaganda on regular news bulletins. Echoing the Soviet propaganda that surrounded Stalinist five-year plans, the Authority broadcasts show images of the equipment 'as if proving the recovery's protocol was working', and implicitly suggesting that their wilful neglect of 'non-priority' regions is fundamental to the prevention of further economic crises (53).

Throughout the novel, settlements and towns destitute of commercial life and economic activity are on the periphery of Sister's travels, from old shopping centres left boarded up to the seas of abandoned vehicles in the car parks of major supermarket franchises (8; 193). These relics of the neoliberal capitalist era that began to accelerate in Britain following the major economic policy reforms of the Thatcher administration have, in the novel, become relics as a result of the price hikes and fall in currency value that resulted from the financial crash, now merely standing as 'useless [...] husks of a privileged era' (20). In *Rith*, that era of privilege, free market economics and consumer choice has now been reduced to survival on cheaply imported tinned meat and fruit from America, with over-populated, non-priority zones seeing a rise in poverty and with all legal trade forcibly dominated by the state's control (31). Typifying the 'dismal salvaged thing that the administered country had become', the Authority heavily regulates all essential goods and supplies, from food rationing

to its control over the public's consumption of meagre energy supplies (21; 8-9). The collapse of the markets and subsequent recession, alongside the ever-evident demise of the ecology and infrastructures of the north, have enabled the government to condense the population in to compressed zones under the rhetoric of 'crisis management' – both enabling the Authority to closely monitor its citizens' activities, in addition to maintaining its under-resourcing of the region, as Jackie reveals to Sister: 'That's how they've been able to move people into those rat holes they call quarters [...] The flood zones just got the ball rolling, made it all seem reasonable' (104). Despite the strict monitoring of all major commodities and supplies as part of the radical economic agenda in place in Sister's Britain, the region remains 'poorly managed' and 'barely liveable', highlighting the austerity programme's failure to improve the socio-economic state of the nation and, furthermore, its reinforcement of the inequalities that preceded the financial crisis (17). Even the illegal black markets that exist in settlements like Rith appear to serve the Authority's purposes, anaesthetising the anger and discontent of potential dissidents, as Sister's note on the insidious acceptance of the drugs trade in Rith suggests: 'Any small feeling of bliss, any cheap narcotic substance available to mask the difficulty, to make people forget what they once had, was easily sold' (30). The deprived terrace quarters in which the majority of the population at Rith live, characterised by 'squalor and overcrowding', are hubs for sickness and diseases that the nation's crippled health system lacks the resources to effectively manage (24). Imagining the collapse of Britain's National Health Service, and the liquidation of the 'minor' utopian vision of universal healthcare initiated by Britain's post-war Labour government, the novel illustrates how the NHS 'cracked apart [...] Epidemics swept through the quarters in every town and city [...] There were new viruses too aggressive to treat [...] Those who did not fall ill seemed just to fade

away' (37).³⁶ While public services suffer from the 'ruthlessness of the banks', the Authority's patriotic rhetoric of economic recovery disguises their role in under-funding public services and the plethora of 'extreme measures put in place to administer the crisis' as part of the austerity programme (26).

In *The Cultural Politics of Austerity: Past and Present in Austere Times* (2013), Rebecca Bramall examines austerity as a phenomenon that can be understood as a 'site of discursive struggle between different visions of the future' (Bramall, 1). Bramall argues that this struggle 'extends beyond party politics and debates about economic policy into environmental, anti-consumerist, and feminist politics [...]', subsequently becoming embedded and contested in media, popular discourse and everyday life (Bramall, 1). In Hall's depiction of the Authority's austerity programme in *The Carhullan Army*, we can evidence a form of austerity that seeks to eliminate such 'discursive struggle[s]' between opposing visions of the future and to reduce all quotidian contestations to consensual acceptance, with Andrew's regression from dissent to complicity epitomising the success of the Authority's ideological endeavour. The environmental, feminist and anti- or post-capitalist politics at the heart of the settlement at Carhullan, then, represents a re-opening of a discursive struggle the Authority has sought to preclude in dystopian Britain. The majority of the population's consensual acceptance of the austere conditions over which the Authority presides in the north – an acceptance that ultimately leads Sister, who can no longer suppress her impulse to resist, to leave Andrew and make her way to Carhullan – appears to be a result of the precarity imposed by the austerity programme itself, and a widespread fear that the meagre supplies and freedoms presently held will also be restricted or withdrawn (21). Hall's illustration of the Authority's preservation of such insecure conditions, I argue, can thus be understood as

³⁶ See Jay Winter's examination of 'minor' utopias in *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (2006); for more on the Attlee government's post-war work on the National Health Service, see chapter six of Thorpe's *A History of the British Labour Party* (2015) (Thorpe: 127-128).

a dystopian extrapolation of the neoliberal ‘government of the precarious’ that political theorist Isabell Lorey examines in her study *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (2012/2015). For Lorey, precarity and ‘precarization’ is not simply the imposition or regulation of precarious living conditions for political subjects, which can be evidenced in *The Carhullan Army*’s descriptions of Rith’s dire conditions under radical economic austerity – the ‘blackouts, deportations, empty supermarkets, and hospital closures’, alongside the quotidian insecurities of Britain’s environmental and political realities (26). Rather, the precariousness Lorey considers extends beyond insecure employment and fragile socio-economic conditions; it is a ‘multiply insecure constituting of bodies’ that, in a Foucauldian sense, coercively encompasses ‘the whole of existence, the body, modes of subjectivation’ (Lorey: 19; 1). Lorey, providing insight in to the nationalist rhetoric and ideology that anaesthetises dissent towards the ruthless economic policy programme in *The Carhullan Army*, employs Foucault’s conception of ‘governmentality’ in order to argue that this contemporary mode of governing the precarious is sustained by instilling an internalised self-discipline in political subjects – a ‘mode of self-control that always serves to regulate “one’s own” precariousness’ (Lorey: 28). The coercive, subjugating anxiety of precariousness is fundamental to the Authority’s dystopian economic agenda in the novel, with precarity and austerity serving as guarantors of the consensus that ‘There is No Alternative’ to the Authority’s socio-economic and political vision for Britain.

Ruling Britannia: Ideology, Rhetoric and Dystopian Forms of Political Control

Both the ecological and economic fragilities of the dystopian Britain depicted in *The Carhullan Army* signal the demise of quasi-utopian imaginaries of the nation, such as that of ‘Rule Britannia’. Hall’s focus on Britain’s ecology and economy, however, is far from

focused on distant visions of Britain's past. While the spectral presence of a fallen 'Britannia' endures throughout the novel's dystopian imagery of the Eden district, the novel equally directs its critical gaze towards the broader socio-cultural decline of 'Cool Britannia', the heavily-politicised contemporary reworking of 'Rule Britannia' that sought to articulate the vibrant, global future of a Britain with a booming creative economy at its heart. In *Cultural Capital: The Rise and Fall of Creative Britain* (2014), Robert Hewison examines how the slogan was adopted from popular discourse by contemporary British politicians seeking to promote the creative economy's potential to provide a significant national economic stimulus and, crucially, to maximise upon the idea's political capital prior to, and following, the pivotal 1997 General Election. The push to define 'Cool Britannia', the self-image of a Britain destined to be at the fore of the hyper-technological, globalised twenty-first century to come, began with the Conservatives prior to the General Election of 1997 – as the declaration of Virginia Bottomley, Secretary of State for National Heritage, suggests: 'Our fashion, culture, and music scene has made us the envy of our international competitors and has placed "Cool Britannia" firmly on the [...] map' (Hewison, 36). The slogan was, however, more recognizably at the heart of New Labour's visions for a contemporary Britain that would radically modernise and invest in its creative economy, with Tony Blair heralding a 'Golden Age' for British arts and culture and Chris Smith, the secretary of state for the newly renamed Department for Culture, Media and Sport following Blair's GE 1997 landslide, declaring that 'Cool Britannia is here to stay' (Hewison, 36). In *The Carhullan Army*, published ten years after GE 1997 and the emergence of the shifting socio-political imaginaries of 'Cool Britannia' at the fore of British political discourse, Hall depicts a nation where the futural aspiration and creative possibilities of 'Cool Britannia' have been shattered. The novel depicts the 'Arcadian revenge' that a rancorous environment inflicts upon the technologies and infrastructures that had been central to New Labour's aspirations for Britain's twenty-

first century future, but, furthermore, envisions the erosion of the long-standing infrastructures, industries and public services that lay at the foundation of post-war British society and, in terms of visions for societal change proposed by major political parties, at the heart of the political imagination of Labour's transformative manifesto for the rebuilding of modern Britain in General Election of 1945 – the stoic futurity of which was concisely summarised by the slogan 'Let Us Face the Future'.³⁷ In contrast to the transformational, future-focused visions of slogans such as 'Let Us Face the Future' and 'Cool Britannia', *The Carhullan Army*, I argue, envisions a radically dystopian reworking of the influential Thatcherite slogan that 'There is No Alternative' ('T.I.N.A').³⁸ Representative of the Thatcher administration's creed that there was 'no alternative' to free-market capitalism and neoliberal economic policies for Britain, *The Carhullan Army* explores the way in which doctrinaire socio-economic consensus can effectively preclude the positing of political alternatives in Britain – in this instance, the Authority's assertion is that the only possible options are those of extreme economic austerity in 'non-priority' zones and the relinquishing of civil liberties and freedoms for the benefit of the 'recovery'. In their strategic use of propaganda and nationalist rhetoric in order to implement a destructive economic austerity programme and, furthermore, to use it as a basis on which to crush discursive and imaginative socio-political alternatives, the Authority effectively demonstrate, in radical dystopian fashion, Thatcher's statement that '[e]conomics are the method; the objective is to change the heart and soul.' (Heffernan, xi).

³⁷ For a historical analysis of the impact of WW2 on Labour's successful 1945 General Election campaign, see Chapter 5 of Thorpe's *A History of the British Labour Party* (Thorpe: 103-118).

³⁸ Highlighting the importance of the slogan to its socio-political context, Richard Heffernan argues in *New Labour and Thatcherism* (2000/2001) that the 'most potent appeal of Thatcherism was the belief that there was no alternative to its vision of society' (Heffernan: 171).

While politicised visions of the future of the nation such as ‘Cool Britannia’ and ‘Let Us Face the Future’ are purposefully precluded by the economic and political conditions imposed by the Authority following Britain’s Civil Reorganisation, discourses of nationalism remain prominent in *The Carhullan Army*. Just as the ‘distorted, bent out of shape’ St George’s cross at the cottage in Vaughsteele presents Sister with doubts on whether the graffiti was ‘an act of vandalism or one last loyal statement from the proprietor before leaving’, the early chapters of *The Carhullan Army* interrogate ways in which patriotism and ideologies of nation can ‘distort’ or reshape socio-cultural discourse and political (inter)subjectivity in contemporary Britain (22).³⁹ The novel extrapolates on this form of distortion, depicting a nostalgic nationalism that has been insidiously resurrected in order to sustain the consensus of the Authority’s political choice – of a ruthless economic Austerity programme and a radically restrictive Civil Reorganisation – as the only possible *modus operandi* for the novel’s Britain. The Authority’s prevailing political rhetoric is rooted in affirmations of a ‘recovery’ from economic crisis and, as Sister’s memory of the ‘spirit we were all being asked to conjure’ suggest, seeks to construct a nostalgic national imaginary based on a narrative of Britain’s domestic efforts preceding and during the Second World War: ‘[it was] like a replica of that war-time stoicism of which the previous century proudly boasted’ (24). This ideal of a fundamentally British form of stoicism, the kind of ‘home front’ stoicism whose roots formed the basis of the post-war zeitgeist of Labour’s ‘Let Us Face the Future’ campaign for the General Election of 1945, however, is promoted in Sister’s dystopian Britain with a view to precluding all imaginative impulses for societal

³⁹ The contemporary focus of Hall’s dystopian critique, is, however, again informed by historical events or moments of modern and contemporary British and Anglo-Irish political history. In this instance, Hall’s exploration of nationalism, particularly within the novel’s questions and discourses of freedom, draws our attention to Jackie’s passing of a book by Terence MacSwiney to Sister, who reads MacSwiney’s claim that ‘*It is not those who can inflict the most, but those who can suffer the most that will conquer*’ (158). The book of MacSwiney’s, who was a Sinn Féin politician and active revolutionary during the Irish struggle for independence (1919-1921), is presumably his posthumously published collection *Principles of Freedom* (1921), a reference that highlights the political and historical consciousness of *The Carhullan Army*’s interrogation of issues of nationalism, liberty and political conflicts in twenty-first century Britain.

transformation. In *The Cultural Politics of Austerity*, Bramall suggests that contemporary narratives invoking past visions of Britain under austerity – in particular, that of a dutiful, stoic wartime Britain – ultimately articulate a ‘pro-growth neoliberal narrative of recovery’ that, by creating this analogous connection with wartime Britain, projects the image of a ‘new, “improved” version of life before austerity’ that is to come (Bramall, 148).⁴⁰ *The Carhullan Army* represents this dynamic in the Authority’s Machiavellian endorsement of a patriotism that reinforces the dogmatism of its consensus that ‘There is No Alternative’ to their mode of governance and vision for Britain’s future. Exemplifying the logic of this Authority-sponsored ethos, Andrew abandons the dissent and civil disobedience that once united he and Sister, believing the regime’s promised falsehood that ‘[o]nce stability returned, so too would the freedoms we had lost’ (31). Wearing by the conditions of life in Rith, Andrew’s resistance crumbles and he adopts a jaded faith in the Authority’s ‘recovery’ propaganda. Their sustained barrage of misinformation in news broadcasts leads Andrew to align with the public consensus that ‘it was madness to be anything other than complicit in Britain’s attempts to rebuild herself’, and that those who wished to enact rebellion against the Authority were merely ‘frauds and fantasists [...] with no sense of financial solution’ (31; 30). Borne from the weakening of his resolve following years of rationing and austerity, Andrew’s gradual disdain for dissent towards the socio-economic consensus is also rooted in a sense of patriotic duty, and a form of nationalism that is shown to appeal to the fragile masculinity of the male figures in Sister’s life throughout the novel. Through Sister’s recollection of her father’s lofty conceptions of ‘his proud country’, her encounter with the

⁴⁰ See Bramall’s reflections on ‘austerity futures’ in chapter seven of *The Cultural Politics of Austerity*. The argument of Bramall’s I have cited above can be found in the following extract from the chapter: ‘Because “austerity Britain” was a circumscribed era – rationing dragged on, but it did eventually come to an end – it is argued that the historical analogy between past and present supports the expectation that austerity is a condition we are going to recover from [...] The pro-growth neoliberal narrative of recovery from our temporary “wartime” footing is one that describes the restoration of a new, “improved” version of life before austerity, in which any remaining barriers to competitiveness, choice and marketization have been removed’ (Bramall, 148).

misogynistic van driver proudly ‘doing his bit for the recovery’, in addition to the fading of Andrew’s anger at her subjection to the government’s attack on her bodily autonomy and civil liberties, it becomes apparent that the Authority’s propaganda is reflective of a deeply patriarchal dystopian Britain (36; 14). Andrew’s eventual complicity with the regime and the patriotic case for supporting the Authority’s promised path to economic recovery leads, chillingly, to the suspension of his previous political sensibilities and moral integrity, as his exclamation in the heat of an argument with Sister reveals to her. Arguing that the national lottery for designating those permitted to conceive a child is a ‘practical thing’ and not a ‘conspiracy’ against women, Andrew derides Sister: ‘Fucking hell, this country is in bits and you’re obsessing about your maternal rights [...] Where are your priorities?’ (34). Andrew’s moral relativism reveals the destructive patriarchal logic of the nationalism that unites would-be opposition behind the Authority’s cause. Such logic, as the novel strikingly demonstrates, endorses a patriotic sense of duty for a nation fondly referred to in the third-person female pronoun while simultaneously enabling a dangerous or complacent disregard for the basic rights of female citizens, as Sister’s retort to Andrew implies: ‘[s]he’s a female, is she, this country that’s been fucked over?’ (31).

The Carhullan Army’s depiction of the Authority’s attack on the human rights and civil liberties of British women suggests that the considerable success of the attack, and the consequent implementation of biopolitical forms of control and domination, owes much to the Authority’s careful dismantling of the democratic processes and constitutional protections of contemporary Britain. *The Carhullan Army*’s account of the British government’s radical decision to enact a ‘Civil Reorganisation’ bears a strong resemblance to Rupert Thomson’s conception of a ‘Civil Rearrangement’ in *Divided Kingdom*, particularly for the ways in which the novel echoes *Divided Kingdom*’s anxieties about the potential undermining of the constitutional protections and civil liberties of British citizens in the face of socio-political or

economic crises. As I have argued for in relation to Thomson's *Divided Kingdom*, this critical trajectory is perhaps best understood within the context of the political debate and controversy surrounding President George W. Bush's signature of the 'USA PATRIOT Act' on October 26th 2001, following terrorist attacks on the United States on 11th September of that year.⁴¹ Exploring an early twenty-first century unease about emerging threats to Britain's domestic security, and within the notable contexts of the London Bombings of 7th July 2005 and the Glasgow Airport attack on 30th June 2007, *The Carhullan Army* describes how government legislation for the radical Civil Reorganisation had been passed after 'another wave of terrorist attacks' had hit Britain (121). In addition to the calamitous economic situation in which Sister's Britain finds itself, the nation's domestic security situation strengthens the government's resolve in electing to declare a 'state of emergency' that enables the implementation of an extreme economic agenda, the restriction of free movement and the strategic rationing of public resources to the disadvantage of 'non-priority' zones (119). Comparable to the 'Internal Security Act' described in Thomson's *Divided Kingdom*'s depiction of a British government's radical response to socio-political crisis, *The Carhullan Army*'s 'state of emergency' also enables the political establishment's executive approval of legislation to facilitate the suspension of the routine checks and balances of judicial and parliamentary processes: the 'Insurgency Prevention (Unrestricted Powers) Act' (1). The Act, under which Sister is ultimately detained without trial, provides the Authority with an efficient means of undermining Britain's democratic processes and constitutional protections. Shortly following the passing of the Act and implementation of the Civil Reorganisation, Sister and Andrew elect to get married in the faint hope of providing themselves with some security within a context in which the 'laws were changing quickly', fearing that their

⁴¹ For the US Department of Justice's description of the USA PATRIOT Act, see: <http://www.justice.gov/archive/ll/highlights.htm>

civil rights were ‘slipping away and there was no telling where it would end’ (26). The Authority’s systematic undermining, or circumvention, of British laws becomes the pretext for the government’s eventual suspension of general elections and dismantling of modern Britain’s tradition of government by representative democracy – a radical move that, as Sister recalls, initially led to ‘all hell [breaking] loose’ during riots and protests surrounding the capital’s parliament (26). The Insurgency Prevention Act enables the government to navigate this turbulent period of chaos and protest, however, in providing a legal basis for the establishment of a ruthless military police force that, as the Act’s name suggests, is granted ‘unrestricted powers’ to neutralise the disorder – a move that Andrew describes as ‘un-British’, and an ‘affront to the rights of the public’ (26). This disastrous combination of recklessly-wielded executive power following the legislative bypassing of parliamentary and judiciary scrutiny, alongside the force of a dangerous military police, enables the Authority to rescind the civil liberties and freedoms of a British population that no longer has the democratic means to effect change on its society – as Sister notably recounts: ‘Things were breaking down, completely, irreparably; all the freedoms we had known were being revoked, and nothing could be done to stop it’ (26).

The emergence of the Authority as a political administration follows a pivotal breaking point in the British public’s distrust of its political establishment in the novel, paving the way for an abandonment of the traditional party political system of modern Britain’s form of government by democracy. This widespread disillusionment is seen to alienate both an older generation familiar with life prior to the Civil Reorganisation and younger malcontents like Megan, who bitterly argues that ‘people were oppressed [...] The government had long ago failed them, and it would go on failing them’ (196). The administration in office at the time of national economic crisis and increasing threats to domestic security is that of the ‘Forward Party’; Sister’s first mention of the party as ‘the *reinvented* Forward Party’ is

strongly suggestive of the most notable remaking of the identity of a political party in contemporary British political history – that of Labour’s self-reinvention as ‘New Labour’ under the leadership of Tony Blair, following the party’s annual conference slogan of 1994: ‘New Labour, New Britain’ (24, *italics mine*; Thorpe, 247).⁴² Following their convincing electoral success, Sister suggests that the downfall of the party contributed to a dangerous vacuum in British politics, ultimately enabling the Authority to seize power. Sister recalls how dissidents were initially ‘united by our disappointment, our anger, and our distrust’ of the rebranded party, who had ‘taken office under the banner of reform’ (24). Failing to reform British politics and fulfil its promise, the Forward Party incites the ire of much of the electorate by signing the ‘Coalition Oil Treaty’ and engaging in a war that Sister suggests was ‘not ours to fight’ (24-25). Hall’s descriptions of this ‘failure of international policy’ again strengthens this allusive connection between the ‘reinvented’ Forward Party and the ‘New’ Labour government that was entering its tenth year in government at the time of the novel’s publication; in this instance, we can locate the novel within a wave of early twenty-first century writing that responds to Britain’s military involvement in the wars of Afghanistan (2001–2014) and Iraq (2003–2011) (24).⁴³ Following its reported failures in domestic and international policies, Sister informs us that shortly after ‘the Forward Party had split, and from the ashes of its new image old doctrines had risen’ (25). In addition to the aforementioned ‘old doctrine’ of ‘There is No Alternative’, and the novel’s radical dystopian reworking of the Thatcherite slogan, we might interpret Sister’s reference to ‘old doctrines’ through a consideration of Hall’s notable choice of name for the party’s notorious new leader:

⁴² This slogan of the October 1994 Labour Party conference subsequently resulted in the coining of the party as ‘New Labour’ under the leaderships of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown between 1994-2010. This ‘New Labour’ branding from October 1994 became more formally and concretely used following the release of the draft manifesto, ‘New Labour, New Life for Britain’ in July 1996

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/background/pastelec/ge97lab.shtml>).

⁴³ My cited timelines here are those outlined by the Imperial War Museums:

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/timeline-of-20th-and-21st-century-wars> (Accessed 03/01/2018 at 08:38).

Powell. In the rapidly shifting political landscape of Sister's Britain, the nation's leadership adopts a markedly anti-immigration stance in policy matters, seeing both an exacerbation of Britain's international isolation and a radical restriction of the free movement of people. Sharing his concerns about domestic policies and radical restrictions in Britain under Powell's leadership, Andrew states that 'now Powell's got control of the party there's no way out [...] He's power hungry, and he's a bigot' (25). Resonating the concerns of Ballard's *Kingdom Come*, *The Carhullan Army*'s shared anxiety concerning the potential rise of far-right attitudes towards socio-political issues in Britain's near-future invokes the surname of a prominent British politician of the right in mid-late twenty-first century British politics: Enoch Powell (1912 –1998). Hall's choice of 'Powell' as the name of a leader fervently opposed to migration is suggestive of a radical dystopian extrapolation of a British immigration policy based on the provocative ideas of Enoch Powell's anti-immigration 'Rivers of Blood' speech of 1968, with Hall seeing the prevention of immigration and free movement across borders as a catalyst for socio-political myopia and the Authority's rise to power.⁴⁴

A notable proposition of *The Carhullan Army*'s vision of an internationally-isolated, homogeneous Britain is that the prohibition of migration across national borders may, as a consequence, ultimately result in the restriction of the freedom of movement even within those borders – a proposition also examined by Rupert Thomson in *Divided Kingdom*'s illustration of a Britain divided and isolated by rigid partitions. Following the Forward Party's demise and a period with 'no central command', the Authority fills the political vacuum and brings Britain 'back to being a country of local regimes' (104). All British land is declared 'state-owned' by the Authority in a radical form of nationalisation that sees the development

⁴⁴ For the full text of Powell's speech from the Conservative Association meeting in Birmingham on April 20 1968, see: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html> (Accessed 13/11/2017 at 17:35).

of isolated ‘official zones’ across the nation (104; 7). ‘Transference’, or free movement between these official zones, is not permitted for ordinary citizens, who are now bound to the areas in which they resided at the time of the financial collapse and implementation of the state of emergency (9). The Unrestricted Powers Act allows the Authority to implement a nationwide ‘travel ban’ and establish ‘detention centres’ in places such as Rith, augmenting the Authority’s ability to suppress dissent – or, in line with the Act’s description, to prevent ‘insurgency’ – and condense smaller populations in to urban hubs that can be policed and monitored with greater ease (9-10). Sister demonstrates the public consensus surrounding this status quo on the partitioning of the nation at the novel’s opening, describing how only ‘government agents and the Authority had any need to travel, or the means to do it [...]’; however, the inevitable cracks in this fragile public consensus can equally be seen in her cautious excitement at the experience of being in a vehicle for the first time since the Civil Reorganisation, and her feeling of being ‘free to go anywhere’. (9, 12). In addition to consolidating their ability to heavily police and monitor populations across official zones, the Authority’s dystopian partitioning of Britain also permits their ability to operate without transparency or accountability. Aided by the Insurgency Prevention Act’s suspension of judicial scrutiny or legal recourse and the dangerous consensus that rhetoric of ‘recovery’ has resulted in, the novel powerfully illustrates the ways in which the Authority employs both physical and systemic forms of violence in order to maintain its control. While the former enabled the Authority to seize control of the nation following the rioting and collapse of parliament prior to the Civil Reorganisation – with the military police’s monitors’ firing ‘live rounds into the crowd’ and use of tear gas on the protestors serving as vivid examples – it is the latter, systemic form of violence that proves most effective in suppressing disorder and

dissent in the novel's Britain (25-26).⁴⁵ While armed guards at the borders of official zones and the unaccountable military police ensure that a palpable threat of lethal violence is ever-present in *Rith*, the novel explores a subtler form of bureaucratic violence through which the body politic and – in Rancièrian terms – the prevailing 'distribution of the sensible' is demarcated and policed. Sister details the nature of this bureaucratic violence that formed a part of the new order following the Civil Reorganisation:

Anyone who had not participated in the census was now off record. Anyone living beyond the designated sectors was considered anonymous, alien. They were discounted. They had chosen not to help with the recovery, and they were no longer part of the recognized nation. The Authority simply called them Unofficials. (15)

'Unofficials', *The Carhullan Army's* equivalent of the Orwellian 'Unperson', are the effective enemies of the state who exist outwith the borders of official zones. Similar to the 'White People' imagined in Thomson's *Divided Kingdom*, Hall envisions a 'discounted' population who are forcefully excluded from their society due to their inability or refusal to comply with the socio-cultural and political consensus of their dystopian Britain. While the abjectification of the White People in *Divided Kingdom's* Britain subtly reinforces the logic of the United Kingdom's partitioning and the constructed identities within each of its four new republics, the Authority's aggressive exclusion of 'Unofficials' in *The Carhullan Army* is vital in its attempts to unite the populations of citizens living a meagre and precarious existence within the confines of the 'recognized nation' by employing divisive nationalist rhetoric, and concurrently strengthens its ability to politically and ideologically disempower the dissidents who have resisted the Civil Reorganisation. Portraying the 'Unofficial' as an

⁴⁵ The crowd features only briefly in *The Carhullan Army*; intriguingly, the 'rioting' crowds are described to be motivated by a politically conscious rationale, in protesting the suspension of Britain's general elections and the establishment's attempts to undermine both civil and constitutional rights. When tensions escalate during the military police's crack down on the protests, however, the more prototypical dystopian vision of the crowd as a self-destructing, entropic force is also evident – as Sister's description suggests: 'the crowds were so large people were crushed' (25).

Other who is antithetical to the vision of the stoic, dutiful, patriotic citizen in the Authority's rhetoric of 'recovery', the Authority legitimises its systemic violences through sustained media campaigns that promote this conception of the Unofficial as 'alien' – a tactic whose success can be evidenced in the remarks of Sister's truck driver, who casually alludes to the fate of acquaintances, the 'daft buggers' who have been 'struck off' by the Authority (14).

In *The Carhullan Army*, the Authority's control of media broadcasts and public information provides a vital means of consolidating its ideological power over a disempowered British population. Following the isolation of Britons within disconnected official zones, the Authority begins an assault on the media in the full realisation that, as Jackie suggests to Sister, 'ignorance leaves people vulnerable' – in this sense, the novel elucidates Hannah Arendt's notion that the ideal climate for the flourishing of totalitarian rule is one in which the distinctions between the true and false, and between fact and fiction, have been dissolved (104).⁴⁶ As the regime's successful vilification of 'Unofficials' suggests, a thorough control of media and news within a nation of isolated 'official zones' enables the Authority to construct nationalist imaginaries, the dominant discourses of Britain's political sphere, and, in Rancièrian terms, to reinforce the regulatory framework of the 'police order' that excludes Unofficials from political space – depriving them of a political appearance that would, according to Rancièrian theory, reveal the arbitrariness and radical inequality of the police order maintained by the Authority (or, more specifically, the 'regulatory framework' of that police order).⁴⁷ The Authority secures an executive control of the national media in

⁴⁶ In 'Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government' (1953), Arendt states that the 'ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist' (Arendt, 321).

⁴⁷ The basis of my Rancièrian reading of the Authority's manipulation of the media and portrayal of 'Unofficials' in *The Carhullan Army* in this point is supported by Stephen Corcoran's analysis of Rancière's work on the 'radical dimension of political appearing', and his note on the ability of the activity of dissensus to posit a 'logic of equality' that reveals the 'arbitrariness' of a given distribution of the sensible, in his introduction to Rancière's *Dissensus* (2010/2013) (Rancière 2010/2013: 4-5).

order to develop and safeguard this Rancièrian police order that ‘characterize[s] bodies and their modes of aggregation’ in dystopian Britain – in this instance, the predominant characterisation is that of those excluded (Unofficials) and those who belong to the ‘recognized nation’ (Rancière 2010/2013: 92). Those who belong, however, are not those upon whom citizenship (as a status that entails basic rights, security and liberties) and political appearance are conferred; rather, they are merely those who are ‘aggregated’ and assigned roles and ‘ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying’ within a precarious political space characterised by radical austerity, brutal policing and a restrictive ‘police order’ (Rancière 1995/1999: 29).⁴⁸ The status of ‘recognized’ citizen merely relates to the arbitrary granting of a bureaucratic ‘citizenship’ while, concurrently, the governing administration actively works to preclude genuine political appearance and subjectivity for the ‘citizens’ who are subject to their authoritarian rule, to ever-diminishing civil rights and liberties, and to the misinformation and lies of state-sponsored media outlets. In this link between biopolitical⁴⁹ forms of control and the ‘police order’ (*la police*) that denies the occurrence of the political (*la politique*), the connections of Rancièrian and Foucauldian theory can be evidenced, as Rancière’s note in a 2000 interview suggests: ‘Foucault uses the term biopolitics to designate things that are situated in the space that I call the police’ (Rancière 2010/2013: 93). Echoing the ‘regulatory framework’ that sustains the Rancièrian police order, Foucault details how ‘regulatory controls’ and interventions are fundamental to a political authority’s ability to exercise ‘biopower’ over a population. This political phenomenon of biopower, historically examined by Foucault in Volume One of *The History of Sexuality*, is described as the ‘numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the

⁴⁸ In *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1995/1999), Rancière describes the police (*la police*) as an order of bodies that ‘defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying’ within a given space of socio-political appearance (Rancière 1995/1999: 29).

⁴⁹ It should be clarified that here ‘biopolitical’ designates *The Carhullan Army*’s representation of a radical dystopian biopolitics, rather than biopolitics in the Foucauldian sense (this latter sense is subsequently clarified in the lines that follow).

subjugation of bodies and the control of populations’ (Foucault 1976/1978: 139-140). One key technique for the subjugation of bodies and control of populations explored in Foucault’s work is that of truth – or, the ways in which the politics of truth within a given political space defines strategies of governance (or domination) and shapes political subjectivity. In his work on ‘Subjectivity and Truth’, Foucault argues that governing people ‘is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which impose coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified’ (Foucault 1997: 181-182). This fluid, or ‘versatile’, balance that Foucault suggests is intrinsic to political governance – a balance of modes of coercion and techniques for the construction of selfhood and subjectivity – can be evidenced in the politics of truth imagined in *The Carhullan Army*’s vision of a dystopian political space. In this political space, the Authority’s ‘techniques which impose coercion’ exist in both explicit and subtle ways, in the visible presence of state power that subjugates resistance – the military police, border guards and Authority officials – and the subtler modes of coercion exercised through a careful, sustained public exposure to the narratives and untruths of news broadcasts. In the latter form of coercion, we can evidence what Foucault describes as ‘complementarity’ between techniques that impose coercion and the processes of constructing and modifying the self. The prevailing form of coercion in Sister’s Britain – a coercion to be a part of the ‘recognized nation’ working together in the name of the ‘recovery’, in opposition to the Unofficials who have betrayed a collective national goal to which *there is no alternative* – ultimately shapes and modifies the subjectivity of former dissidents such as Andrew, who reconstruct a selfhood bound by the ideal of dutiful, stoic patriotism promulgated in the state’s propaganda of Britain’s ‘recovery’.

The politics of truth played out in *The Carhullan Army* thus demonstrates a Foucauldian notion of truth that Thomas R. Flynn describes to be ‘truth as dividing and

excluding, truth as constraining and liberating, truth as political and ethical' (Flynn, 533). In his paper 'Truth and Subjectivation in the Later Foucault', Flynn examines Foucault's conception of truth as 'dominion over others' (Flynn, 534). Foucault posits that the means of production of truth – the 'production' of truth meaning not the production of true statements, but the 'disposition of domains where the practices of the true and the false can be [...] regulated' – has played a fundamental role in the ways in which human beings have governed themselves and others within the modern societies examined in his historical-theoretical analyses (Flynn, 534). This 'governmental' aspect of truth explored by Flynn in Foucault's later writings is shown in a radical dystopian light in *The Carhullan Army*, where the Authority's grasp on all societal domains where 'the practices of the true and the false' are regulated and reinforced evidences truth as a form of 'dominion over others' – or, perhaps more befitting to the traces of the Orwellian dystopia within the novel, *untruth* as 'dominion over others'. By isolating the nation's populations within official zones and monopolising the sources of public information and news, the Authority exercises its dominion to ensure that, to recall Jackie's aforementioned assessment, the public remains both 'ignorant' of events and realities outwith the borders of their respective zones and 'vulnerable' to 'recovery' rhetoric and state propaganda (104). Akin to the novel's depiction of the Authority's assault on the economic and legislative political structures of contemporary Britain, the attack on truth within political space most notably begins amidst the flux of the nation's financial and political crises. Foreshadowing the eventual suspension of the general elections and undermining of democratic processes following the Civil Reorganisation, the media's political coverage of debates taking place in the Houses of Parliament is abruptly abandoned. Sister describes how in the weeks preceding the financial crash and declaration of a state of emergency all coverage of parliamentary proceedings had 'ceased to broadcast', with the general public left 'to speculate about whether the dysfunction had increased and paralysed

the mechanism altogether, or whether representatives were belatedly getting down to the business of trying to prevent the country's ruin' (109-110). The government's decision to obscure the realities of political debate and decision-making from the general public sees the commencement of a trend that the Authority ultimately places at the heart of its governance strategy, echoing the paradoxical maxim of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s Ingsoc government that 'IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH' (Orwell, 6).⁵⁰

Sharing the Orwellian vision of state-sponsored broadcasts designed for the psychological coercion of subjugated citizens, *The Carhullan Army* illustrates a form of dominion by misinformation and depoliticisation where dishonest media reporting is exacerbated, eventually resulting in unchecked propaganda. Prior to his alignment with the ideological hegemony, Andrew expresses his emerging frustrations and concerns about the untruths of the media, stating 'I can't stand the news [...] It's all lies' (16). His misgivings are evidence of Hall's dystopian critical gaze at the role of 'spin' and partisan media reporting in twenty-first century British politics, as are the emergence of the Authority's aforementioned evening news bulletins that proclaim the successes of the 'recovery's protocol' alongside public television that, as Sister claims, was 'pitiful and full of propaganda' (53, 114). As Andrew's early distrust of state-sponsored broadcasting and misleading sources of news suggests, the novel's vision of propaganda does not, however, suggest a success on par with that of Ingsoc in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; rather, the Authority's most effective means of dominion-by-untruth is influenced by the government's moves to suspend the broadcasting of all parliamentary debate and decision-making prior to the

⁵⁰ It is furthermore arguable that *The Carhullan Army* sees the fulfilment of the sacred trinity elaborated by the Ingsoc government's famous slogan in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Sister's fleeting descriptions of 'rolling conflicts' abroad and geopolitical wars that were 'not ours to fight' are suggestive of a government wilfully constructing foreign enemies in order that 'WAR IS PEACE'; additionally, we might read a form of the Orwellian aphorism that 'FREEDOM IS SLAVERY' in the Austerity-ravaged conditions of life and dystopian labour conditions within 'non-priority zones' such as Rith, within which citizens dutifully relinquish their (already compromised) freedoms and accept their brutal subjugation in the name of the 'recovery' effort (24-25).

collapse, and leans toward the tactic of ensuring that the public remain uninformed about the political realities of dystopian Britain. Sister sheds light on this insidious strategy in the novel's opening chapters:

No genuine rural reports had been broadcast for at least five years. It wasn't in the interest of the Authority to issue them. Their circulars never made the mention of the other half of the landscape, the other half of Britain. (15)

It was said there were executions. But there was no way of knowing if this was true. Radio and television broadcasts in the allocation hours were censored. There was no verification of what the structure of government really looked like now, whether it was impenetrable, or whether it had vanished altogether, and in its place something else existed. (38-39)

Sustaining a climate of uncertainty and untruth enables the Authority to preclude resistance in *The Carhullan Army*, where dissidents in the years following the Civil Reorganisation are unable to direct their individual desires for change towards the building of a collective resistance movement. The Authority's depoliticisation strategy means such dissidents struggle to begin to conceive of how to dismantle a regime in the absence of any reliable information about 'what the structure of government looked like'; furthermore, they have no genuine knowledge of 'the other half of Britain', and are thus isolated from those who might collaborate across Britain's new administered zones. Jackie explains the Authority's use of misinformation in order to preclude collective resistance to Sister, describing how 'enemies of the state had to be played down, never described as a serious threat [...] Otherwise people might get ideas' (103). The prevention of such 'ideas', and the reinforcement of nationalist narratives through the sustained workings of propaganda on the subconscious of the public, exemplifies the novel's vision of a dystopian politics of truth where, along the lines of Foucault's theoretical proposition, both ideological coercions and influences on the formation or modification of subjectivity are integral to the 'biopower' of a dystopian government.

The Carhullan Army's most explicit depiction of the dystopian form of biopower the Authority employs for the achievement of the 'subjugation of bodies and the control of

populations’, however, is to be found in the novel’s vision of a Britain where the ruthless rationality behind a radical economic austerity programme has extended to a broader instrumental reason through which the Authority sets its sights on the basic human rights and civil liberties of women (Foucault 1976/1978: 139-140).⁵¹ Driven by the rhetoric of economic ‘recovery’ at all costs and enabled by the anti-democratic legislation passed during the financial and political crises, the Authority begins to establish a destructive form of consensus in relation to the state’s role in regulating rates of reproduction. As a result, the Authority conducts an ideologically-driven ‘anti-breeding campaign’, legislates that reproduction is permitted only via selection in the state-managed ‘baby lotto’ and brutally enforces mandatory contraception, administering the invasive ‘coil implant’ apparatus that is required of every female citizen capable of reproducing (39; 90; 17). *The Carhullam Army* here echoes the influential vision of a repressive state’s control of reproduction and the female body in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), and reflects a broader dystopian tradition of imagining the interference of oppressive political authorities in the sexual activity, reproductive rights or (in)fertility of its citizens.⁵² In *The Carhullam Army*, the goal of the Authority’s control of reproduction is, I argue, to protect its consensus that ‘There is No Alternative’ (to their political agenda) from the transformative possibilities that the production of new life and children can bring. This threat and transformational outlook can, would argue, be best understood through the concepts of Edelmanian ‘reproductive futurism’ and Arendtian ‘natality’ explored in Chapter Four of this thesis – pointing to another notable connection between the dystopian critiques of *The Carhullam Army* and Thomson’s *Divided*

⁵¹ My use of the term ‘instrumental rationality’ here connects to Max Horkheimer’s conception of ‘instrumental reason’ from *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (1974/2012). Horkheimer’s notion of the instrumentality of the twentieth century state-bureaucratic apparatus’s form of rationality – and the negative effects of that instrumental reason on the dominated individual subject – correlates, I argue, with Hall’s illustration of the logic of the Authority’s governance strategies in the novel.

⁵² Prime examples of such speculative visions in contemporary or post-war British dystopian writing are Maggie Gee’s *The Ice People* (1992), P.D. James’s *Children of Men* (1992) and Anthony Burgess’s *The Wanting Seed* (1962).

Kingdom. The novel's imaginative development of ideas of birth and beginning are also interpreted by Iain Robinson, who describes Sister's emergence from her solitary confinement upon arrival at Carhullan as a 'rebirth of sorts' (Robinson, 201). Robinson's note suggests that even in Jackie's brutal fundamentalism we can evidence the vital connection of birth and new beginnings that, in the novel, is reactionary to the sterility of a Britain that forecloses new beginnings, alterity and socio-political possibility.

In 'Utopia, Dystopia and New Global Uncertainties in Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*', Robinson suggests that the Authority's attack on the rights of Britain's female population is the 'classical' dystopian foregrounding for Hall's depiction of the attempted form of '*feminist* eco-topia' at Carhullan (Robinson, 200; italics mine). While Robinson's point locates the crucial connection of the feminist elements of Hall's dystopian critique and the 'critical' utopian imaginary of the novel, we can, I argue, evidence further nuances in Hall's illustration of the conditions of life for women in dystopian Britain. Those nuances, explored in the final paragraphs of this section respectively, are twofold. The first, I argue, is that Hall's powerful depiction of radical dystopian biopower focused on British women envisions the expansion of the instrumental rationality of the logic of radical economic austerity, where both economic and gender inequalities become subject to a radical dystopian regression that questions the destructive consensus of subtler forms of both inequalities present in contemporary Britain. This first nuance is evidenced within a vision of a Britain where fundamentalist attitudes towards economic recovery and national security create a climate in which physical violence and systemic injustices against women are tolerated. In her criticisms of the inequalities and injustices rife in dystopian Britain – 'a world of inferiority' for women, and a society of 'male dominance' – Jackie details how women are 'underpaid' and subject to objectification and misogyny: 'Women were treated like cunts back down there [...] Like second-class citizens and sex objects' (109; 115). The patriarchal

and misogynistic attitudes of Sister's Britain are equally evident in the novel's description of the destructive nationalism that dominates socio-political discourses, and Andrew's remark that 'this country is in bits and you're obsessing about your maternal rights [...] Where are your priorities?'. This pervasive misogyny becomes embedded in the outlook of the state following the Civil Reorganisation, as we learn that '[r]eports of [...] rape were seldom punished with more than a reprimand' under the Authority's regime (33; 38). Sister reports that 'the prison system could manage only the most serious offenders' following the Civil Reorganisation, suggesting that the widespread failure to enforce policing and judicial protections violence against women aligns with a broader socio-political consensus that enables the denial of female citizens' right to bodily autonomy (38). These oppressive subjugations are frequently symbolised by the 'regulator', or mandatory coil implant, that enables the Authority to forcibly manage birth rates and routinely subject women to the humiliation and sexual exploitation of 'random' examinations where they are forced to 'display themselves to the monitors in the backs of cruisers' (90; 27). Hall solidifies the importance of the coil to her dystopian critique later in the novel as Sister's 'regulator' is passed around for all to see at Carhullan, unifying the Sisterhood behind Jackie's decision to overthrow the Authority at Rith and liberate the women suffering under the misogynistic brutality of the regime (119).

Foucault's interrogation of the body within 'disciplinary space' in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975/1977) informs this reading of Hall's depiction of a radical dystopian biopower that subjugates women – a subjugation that sees the 'human body [...] entering a machinery of power' in order that it can be controlled and coerced at will (Foucault 1975/1977: 138; 143). In Hall's descriptions of the machineries of power through which the Authority governs Rith, a space regulated by strict policing, surveillance and restriction of movement, we can locate important elements of *Discipline and Punish's*

conception of a ‘disciplinary space’. The endgame of a political power that regulates such a space is, as Foucault describes, to ‘establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual’ (Foucault 1975/1977: 143). Control over bodies and the body is integral to both disciplinary practices and disciplinary space which, according to Foucault, produces ‘subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies’ (Foucault 1975/1977: 138). Foucault’s conception of ‘docile’ bodies within disciplinary space in *Discipline and Punish* is frequently reflected in Hall’s depictions of life in Rith, with Sister even explicitly invoking the image of punished bodies in her description of how ‘the floors creaked under the weight of so many *penalised* bodies’ (88). Foucault’s analysis of the production of ‘subjected’ bodies sheds light on the importance of control over the female body to the Authority in *The Carhullan Army*, as not only does the regime’s domination of the body signify a misogynistic, instrumental gaze – it signifies the Foucauldian idea that the coercion and subjection of individual bodies is key to the creation of a ‘docile’ body politic.⁵³ Resulting in the ‘docility’ guaranteed through the austere, insecure conditions of life in Rith, the Authority’s economic austerity and subjugation of women – linked by the state control of reproductive rights and management of birth rates in the ‘recovery’ effort – can thus be understood as two state policies united by an instrumental rationality that enhances the Authority’s ability to exercise control over populations within the disciplinary space of its ‘official zones’. The end product of this dystopian form of control through biopolitical coercion and economic insecurity is, in Foucauldian terms, the establishment and safeguarding of a ‘perfectly administered society’ – a society that the Authority, in the novel’s

⁵³ The ‘Foucauldian idea’ I refer to here – i.e. the notion that the subjection of individual bodies is fundamental to the creation of a broader machinery of power over ‘the body’, or a body politic – can be evidenced in the following point from *Discipline and Punish*: ‘It was a question not of treating the body, en masse, “wholesale”, as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it “retail”, individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself — movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body’ (Foucault 1975/1977: 136-137)

depiction, wishes to be comprised of a myopic, homogeneous population.⁵⁴ In her work on the reception of Foucault in contemporary feminist theory, Jana Sawicki argues that Foucault's 'genealogy of the emergence of the ideal of a perfectly administered society' in *Discipline and Punish* represents a 'dystopian narrative of decline' that we might understand as oppositional to Whiggish narratives of progress (Sawicki, 293). Sawicki's reading of the dystopian elements of this Foucauldian theoretical trajectory paves the way for a reading of *The Carhullan Army*'s dystopian narrative of twenty-first century Britain's decline – a sharp decline of political, socio-economic and environmental conditions – as one that is equally oppositional to the aspirational narratives and political promise of New Labour's visions of a 'New Politics for the New Century', of the 'golden age' of Cool Britannia, and of a radical possibilities of a political philosophy of the 'Third Way'. Along these lines, the novel reflects the revitalisation of critique that Tom Moylan identifies in contemporary dystopias that challenge the hegemonies of neoliberal capitalism, conservative rule and an emerging form of 'compromised' social democracy that, in an allusion to the economic and political visions of Blair and Anthony Giddens, offers a 'false utopianism' through 'bad faith exercises in "third way" solutions'.⁵⁵

The second key nuance of Hall's vision of a dystopian Britain in which female citizens and the female body are subject to radical subjugation can be seen in the novel's illustration of a dystopian government that conceives of heterogeneous female political subjectivity as a manifestation of a radical Otherness – an Otherness that fundamentally undermines the myopic homogeneity of Britain's 'docile' body politic.⁵⁶ This manifestation of radical

⁵⁴ Highlighting Foucault's own reflections on *Discipline and Punish*, Jana Sawicki clarifies that the book was 'not intended as a portrait of the whole of society, but rather as a genealogy of the emergence of the ideal of a perfectly administered society' (Sawicki, 293).

⁵⁵ See Anthony Giddens' work on the 'Third Way' in *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (1998) Cambridge: Polity Press.

⁵⁶ My use of 'Other' and 'Otherness' here is in line with my usage the terms in Chapter One – i.e. in accordance with Julia Kristeva's definitions and usage of the term(s) in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980/1982).

difference represents, I argue, the threat that such affirmations of socio-political possibility pose to administrations that seek to preclude affirmations of future alterity. The Othering of the heterogeneous female subject is evidenced from the outset of *The Carhullan Army*, in Sister's descriptions of the disgust and hatred that has been cultivated for Carhullan's Sisterhood in Rith. Sister recounts the attitudes of the locals who, knowing little about life at Carhullan, hold firm prejudices against its inhabitants. This witch-hunt – the Sisters are viewed, quite literally, as 'witches, up to no good' – is encountered by Sister as a child following a skirmish at the local market, where three Sisters of Carhullan are abused and called 'dykes' (48). The incident in Rith is reflective of the climate created by the divisive rhetoric of Authority propaganda, resulting in a public consensus that the Sisters 'were nuns, religious freaks, communists, convicts [...] They were child-deserters, men-haters, cunt-lickers, or celibates' (48). Not simply deplored as 'Unofficials' who have abandoned the 'recovery' effort, the misogynistic nature of these reactionary societal attitudes to the women of Carhullan is suggestive of the threat that their heterogeneity poses to the ideological foundations of the socio-political consensus on which the Authority's biopower over Rith (and Britain) depends. In their introduction to *Foucault and the Making of Subjects* (2016), Cremonesi, Irrera, Lorenzini and Tazzoli describe how 'mechanisms of subjection and control constantly try to tame, discipline and make governable the spaces and forms of subjectivation enacted by subjects in order to resist or to change existing power relations' (Cremonesi et al., 2). Both the Authority's rendering of the women of Carhullan as 'Unofficials' and the abjectifying gaze with which they are regarded within official zones comprise the coercive means through which the potential of their political dissent is, to adopt Cremonesi et al.'s Foucauldian terminology, tamed and disciplined in order that 'existing power relations' remain intact. However, the Sisterhood's political dissensus – and their 'subjectivation', or reclamation of subjectivity through a rejection of their 'subjection' at the

hands of the Authority – ultimately reveals the arbitrariness of the ‘police order’ of dystopian Britain and sustains Sister’s desire for a better future outwith Rith’s borders.

The heterogeneity in evidence at Carhullan is not only constituted by the Sisterhood’s dissensus and rejection of dystopian Britain’s homogeneity in favour of the alternative future presented by Jackie’s attempted form of ‘feminist ecotopia’, to again cite Robinson’s chosen terminology; their dissensus further extends to revealing the arbitrariness of regressive societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality (Robinson, 200). In contrast to the abuse, prejudice and homophobia of those in Rith who categorise them as ‘dykes’, ‘freaks’ and ‘cunt-lickers’, the alternative space of Carhullan presents the Sisterhood with the possibility to transgress, resist or transcend the homogeneity maintained within the boundaries of the ‘disciplinary space’ of Rith. Observing this difference in the Sisterhood, and the possibilities the heterogeneous space of Carhullan offers in comparison to Rith, Sister notes how the women of Carhullan ‘seemed to be sexless [...] creatures who bore no sense of category’ (118-119). The police order that upholds such categories and ‘ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying’ in both Rith and dystopian Britain is ultimately resisted, rejected and exposed as arbitrary by the Sisterhood, whose perceived androgyny here belies the reductive binaries and draconian social conservatism of the recognised nation that has excluded them (Rancière 1995/1999: 29). Amidst a socio-political setting where a radical dystopian extrapolation of the maxim that ‘There is No Alternative’ holds ideological sway in socio-political discourses, this rejection of categories at Carhullan reflects a key argument of Judith Butler’s in *Undoing Gender* (2004), that ‘[f]or those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is necessity’ (Butler, 31). Butler’s argument and Hall’s depiction of Carhullan as a heterogeneous space of possibility converge in that, for both, conceiving of the possible is a fundamentally political or ethical act often precluded by the homogenising logic of a regulatory framework – in this instance, the regulatory framework behind the norms and

‘categories’ of gendered subjectivities. Anna Cottrell’s article on the treatment of love in Sarah Hall’s fiction locates, in *The Carhullan Army*, the rejection of such norms and categories in Sister’s rejection of her marriage for ‘non-normative’ encounters, with Sister exhibiting ‘polyvalent’ sexual behaviour that defies the ‘heteronormative oppression’ of the Authority (Cottrell, 5; 7).⁵⁷ In their dogmatic attitudes to heteronormativity and endeavours to cultivate societal homogeneity, the Authority demonstrates an understanding of the premise of Butler’s thesis, that possibility is a fundamental pre-requisite for the possibilities of a singular subjectivity to be realised. The realisation of all forms of transformational (political) subjectivities represents a fundamental threat to the homogeneous consensus of dystopian Britain and the Authority’s ideological and biopolitical control in the novel – a key element of Hall’s critical dissensus that the Foucauldian and Butlerian theoretical perspectives explored in this section present as a means of intervention in the socio-political present of twenty-first century Britain. Deborah Youdell highlights this point of convergence between Foucault and Butler’s thought, highlighting how

Foucault seeks to develop understandings of how the present is made, and so how it might be unmade, by “following lines of fragility in the present” [...] Butler takes this further and posits a performative politics in which [...] performative subjects engage a deconstructive politics that intervenes and unsettles hegemonic meanings (Youdell, 512).

Both Foucault and Butler’s theory present alternative means of achieving a critical intervention that holds the potential of ‘unmaking’ the present, or tracing its ‘lines of fragility’ in order to understand, critique and transform it.⁵⁸ *The Carhullan Army* equally traces such ‘lines of fragility’ within an increasingly fragile present – in this specific instance, its critical

⁵⁷ See Anna Cottrell (2017) ‘The power of love: from feminist utopia to the politics of imperceptibility in Sarah Hall’s fiction’. *Textual Practice*. Taylor & Francis Online. URL: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0950236X.2017.1371218?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

⁵⁸ Jana Sawicki argues that this goal is, in fact, fundamental to Foucault’s methodology itself, stating that ‘Foucault brings to our attention historical transformations in practices of self-formation in order to reveal their contingency and to free us for new possibilities of self-understanding, new modes of experience, new forms of subjectivity, authority, and political identity.’ (Sawicki, 288).

intervention is focused on the position of women within political space and political discourse of a twenty-first century in which writers of dystopian fiction, such as Hall, critically interrogate the potential for emerging crises of economies and national securities to result in the regression of hard-won civil rights, protections and socio-political progress. Not only does Hall offer a typically dystopian warning, in this sense; her dystopian dissensus enacts the introduction of excluded, heterogeneous female subjects to the ‘field of perception’, in the form of the women of Carhullan – who are, it must be noted, ultimately denied genuine subjectivity by the emergence of Jackie’s brutalism and fundamentalist dogmas.⁵⁹ These heterogeneous subjects nonetheless demonstrate, in their reclamation of political subjectivity and defiance of the Authority’s maxim that there can be no alternative to their political present, the Foucauldian and Butlerian conception of the ‘always-present potentiality’ of acting political subjects to ‘alter, unsettle and invert the power relations they are shaped by’ (Cremonesi et al., 2).⁶⁰

‘T.I.N.A.’ and Carhullan: Deconstructing Utopia, Reconstructing Political Space

We’ve become used to change always happening elsewhere, haven’t we? We’ve become used to waiting, hoping to be saved, hoping those in charge will reform and reform us. It’s the sickness of our breed. And it has become our national weakness. Sisters, no one is going to help us. There is only us. So why not here? Why not now? (195)

In *The Carhullan Army*, the state’s systemic suppression of heterogeneity has, as the first section of this chapter has argued, coercively shaped a socio-political consensus that ‘There is No Alternative’ (‘T.I.N.A.’) to the status quo – a status quo that disavows worsening

⁵⁹ Here I again draw upon Steven Corcoran’s informative interpretation of Rancièrian theory’s case for ability of dissensus to effect the introduction of ‘new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception’ (Rancièr 2010/2013: 2).

⁶⁰ In their introduction to *Foucault and the Making of Subjects* (2016), Cremonesi, Irrera, Lorenzini and Tazzoli describe the potency of Foucault’s conception of subjectivity, noting how for Foucault the ‘always-present potentiality of the subjects to alter, unsettle and invert the power relations they are shaped by is not the side effect of techniques of subjection but, on the contrary, their very condition of possibility’ (Cremonesi et al., 2).

economic and gender inequalities, the declining state of the environment in the face of the effects of climate change, and forecloses the means of effecting collective democratic action. While the novel explores the role of ideology, rhetoric and propagandist slogans in modern and contemporary British politics, it does not reference the Thatcherite ‘T.I.N.A.’ slogan explicitly. The ‘T.I.N.A.’ ideology is, however, a vital socio-economic and political reference point for interpreting *The Carhullan Army*’s dystopian vision of Britain’s future; in particular, its vision of the catastrophic collapse of the aspirations of the neoliberal economic reforms initiated during the Thatcher premiership, and later advanced under the governments of Major and Blair, and, secondly, the novel’s interrogation of the Thatcher-influenced ‘consensus politics’ that was fundamental to New Labour’s electoral and political successes in the decade that preceded the novel’s publication.⁶¹ Thatcher, and ‘Thatcherism’, played a crucial role in the formation of New Labour’s political philosophy, as Richard Heffernan’s study *New Labour and Thatcherism* (2000/2001) argues. Heffernan elucidates the complexity of the term ‘Thatcherism’ itself, a portmanteau that, he suggests, has five mainstream usages.⁶² It is the fifth of those that proves most instructive for the interpretation of the ‘T.I.N.A.’ slogan set out in this chapter: Thatcherism as an ‘ideological project, a vehicle which advanced a post-social democratic neo-liberal political agenda’ (Heffernan, 19). That neoliberal political agenda, whose downfall is evidenced in *The Carhullan Army*’s depictions of Britain’s twenty-first century economic crisis and return to a heavily state-regulated economic model, accelerated under a New Labour government that, as Heffernan claims, ultimately ‘settled for reworking rather than replacing the Thatcherite markings gouged on

⁶¹ The first of these two points is supported by Heffernan’s claim that ‘Labour now works within a policy terrain bequeathed it by the Thatcher and Major governments’, and in his work to demonstrate New Labour’s accomplishments in ‘rooting existing neo-liberalism ever deeper within Britain’s political and economic system’ (Heffernan, ix; vii).

⁶² In his comprehensive clarification of the predominant meanings of the portmanteau, Heffernan lists the following: ‘(1) a short hard description of what the Thatcher-led Conservative governments did at any one time; (2) a popular political movement; (3) a policy style; (4) a form of political leadership; or [...] (5) an ideological project, a vehicle which advanced a post-social democratic neo-liberal political agenda’ (Heffernan, 19).

the palimpsest of British politics' (Heffernan, x). A key element of the palimpsestuous imprint that connects Thatcherism and New Labour in Heffernan's study is 'consensus politics', which he defines as the 'development of a series of contestable political beliefs translated over time into a set of assumptions common to all parties'; these assumptions, for Heffernan, find their 'expression in an implicit "agreement" acknowledging a prevailing political orthodoxy' (Heffernan, xiii). A form of consensus politics – that which endorsed the neoliberal economic 'policy terrain' of Thatcherism, and the 'Third Way' political philosophy that sought to transcend the traditional contestations of the political Left and Right in twentieth century Britain – was fundamental to the formation and development of the New Labour government in office at the time of *The Carhullan Army*'s writing and publication (Heffernan, ix).

The Carhullan Army's dystopian reworking of the ideology that 'T.I.N.A.', and depiction of the radical acceleration of a consensus politics that a maxim such as 'T.I.N.A.' demands, is befitting to a contemporary period where the dissolving distinctions between the genres of dystopian and post-apocalyptic fictions – in which new socio-political beginnings and possibilities frequently emerge only following the eschatological demise of a dystopian present – support the argument of theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek that the consensual, post-political present is one in which it is easier to envision the end of the world than the systemic breakdown of neoliberal late capitalism (Jameson, 2009: 50; Žižek, 2011: x-xi). *The Carhullan Army* imagines how, in reaction to the prevailing consensus that precludes possibilities for societal change, a collective of female dissidents enact a series of economic, environmental, feminist and political alternatives outwith the 'official zones' of Britain. Within Rith, as Sister's testimonies have shown, those who resist the socio-economic consensus that 'T.I.N.A.' are denounced as 'frauds and fantasists [...] with no sense of financial solution, only contrary ideas and gripes' (30). This recession of the socio-political

imagination sees citizens lose faith in their sense that Britain ‘could be better’, or that ‘the worst could be prevented’ (24). Instead, the population is coercively conditioned to accept ‘the way of things’ and fear the risks that alternative visions present (24). This coercion – which we might again through Lorey’s theoretical framework, as a people governed by ‘precarization’ effectively self-regulate their precariousness by viewing such societal alternatives as a prospective source of further insecurity – effectively results in the obedience or complicity of the populations within official zones, for whom ‘the present and the future [become] intolerable propositions’ (24; 37). It is within this dystopian context that we can best understand *The Carhullan Army*’s form of the ‘social dreaming’ defined in Lyman Tower Sargent’s influential essay ‘The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited’ (Tower Sargent: 3). The novel’s ‘social dreaming’ is, in line with Tower Sargent’s definition, a fundamentally self-reflexive and critical form of utopianism – as Iain Robinson’s reading of Carhullan as a Moylanian ‘critical utopia’ suggests (Robinson: 199). Sister and Jackie demonstrate this self-reflexivity and conscious engagement with discourses of Utopia: prior to her arrival, Sister remarks that ‘[t]he place sounded utopian’, however she soon learns that Jackie ‘did not try to describe Carhullan as any kind of Utopia’ (48). The novel’s allusively utopian depiction of Carhullan is, while powerfully marked by the brutal militarism and fundamentalism of Jackie’s rule, infused with discernible elements that are suggestive of a ‘microtopian’ impulse for better forms of societal relations and a set of renewed environmental, economic and political beginnings. In her article ‘Microtopias: the post-apocalyptic communities of Jim Crace’s *The Pesthouse*’, Caroline Edwards describes the ‘microtopian’ possibilities evidenced in contemporary post-apocalyptic and speculative fictions, arguing that literary visions of micro-utopian (or microtopian) communities embody ‘the dissolution of the “mass” utopia in to its “minor” or minimalist fragments or new beginnings’ (Edwards 2009: 775). This ‘microtopian’ impulse should be understood as, as

Edwards has argued elsewhere with reference to the concept of ‘minor’ utopias in Jay Winter’s study *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (2006), a form of ‘post-traditional’ utopianism – a utopianism that rejects the dystopian potential of the ‘mass’ Utopia in favour of ‘minor’ utopian moments and a ‘critical’ utopianism founded in heterogeneity, anti-perfectionism and socio-political possibility (Edwards, 2011: 177-180).⁶³ While the thoroughly dystopian elements of Jackie’s fundamentalism invokes the dystopian potential of the ‘mass’ Utopia, *The Carhullan Army*’s nuanced ‘critical’ utopianism sees, I claim, forms of microtopian possibility enacted in both its environmental and democratic practices.

The Carhullan Army envisions, as the first section of this chapter’s analysis of Hall’s vision of ‘Arcadian revenge’ suggests, the effects of a radically negative ‘eco-austerity’ on the local environment of Cumbria, in addition to the quotidian local effects that austerity has on the ‘non-priority’ areas of the country.⁶⁴ In contrast, the settlement at Carhullan offers an alternative vision of ‘environmental possibility’ and ‘true domestic renewal’ through sustainable environmental practices and a philosophy of ecological stewardship (166). As Deborah Lilley has argued, the novel’s eco-topian vision evidences *The Carhullan Army*’s contribution to a discernible wave of contemporary British writing exploring an ecocritical pastoralism that unsettles and challenges ‘contemporary understandings of people and place’, within a context in which the ‘environmental dystopianism’ argued for by Peter Boxall in *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (2013) is prevalent (Lilley: 60, 62; Boxall: 217). While the novel reflects the ‘environmental dystopianism’ that Boxall identifies in contemporary fictions such as Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*

⁶³ For Edwards’ development of Winter’s concept of ‘minor’ utopias within her theoretically-informed readings of novels by Jim Crace and David Mitchell, see: Edwards 2009, 764; Edwards 2011, 185.

⁶⁴ See chapter four of Brammall’s *The Cultural Politics of Austerity* for an exploration of ‘eco-austerity’ and the construction of new historical subjectivities in contemporary Britain. I here refer to ‘eco-austerity’ in Brammall’s sense, as the intersection of austerity and sustainability politics – albeit, in the dystopian sense of a *radically negative* relation between austerity and sustainability, as evidenced in *The Carhullan Army*.

(2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), it progresses its quasi-apocalyptic images of nature's Arcadian revenge by presenting a dystopianism that is 'critical' and self-reflexive, in the Moylanian sense, in the location and engagement of utopian enclaves that oppose, and seek to transform, the environmental degenerations of the present moment. The 'truly green initiative' at Carhullan fulfils the dormant utopian wishfulness evidenced in Sister's long-standing desire for a garden or allotment amidst the bleakness of life in Rith early in the novel – a wishfulness that is far from a facile form of utopian social dreaming (55; 28). Such utopian wishfulness reflects a more profound 'anticipatory consciousness' that, according to Ernst Bloch's magnum opus *The Principle of Hope* (1954-59/1986), has the potential to be emancipatory and transformative in its ability to perceive 'the unrealized emancipatory potential in the past, the latencies and tendencies of the present, and the realizable hopes of the future' (Kellner: 84).⁶⁵ The realizable hope that Carhullan's economic and environmental model, and Sister's utopian dreaming, represents is founded on sustainable practices that enable, in terms of Lilley's argument for the novel's 'new pastoral', a radically better relation between people and place. In contrast to the tinned imports of barely nutritional foods from America that sustain the population at Rith, Sister recalls how women from Carhullan would market local produce in the past, and upon her arrival takes part in the Sisterhood's sustainable working of the land for its produce (47). In contrast to the 'industrial stink' that Sister is accustomed to, Carhullan offers the smell 'of nature, untouched and original' – here, Sister's encounter with surroundings in which people and place coexist in a radically better form inspires a social dreaming and utopian wishfulness where she remarks, in thoroughly Blochian fashion,

⁶⁵ This reflection on the 'anticipatory consciousness' explored in Volume One (Part Two) of Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* is that of Douglas Kellner (2012) in 'Ernst Bloch, Utopia, and Ideology Critique', from Michael Marder and Patricia Vieira (eds) *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought*. 83-96. London: Continuum.

that the bucolic setting appeared ‘somehow redeemed from the past’ (57). Retrieving this realizable pastoralism, Carhullan’s sustainable model and environmentally-conscious way of life provides the Sisterhood with the ‘sense of basic usefulness and dependence’ and the feeling of not being ‘divorced from reality any more’, in marked contrast to the depoliticising, homogenising unrealities of a life in Rith where ‘everywhere the atmosphere was of human pressure’ (131). Divorced from the quotidian socio-economic precariousness of life in Rith, it also appears that Carhullan, seemingly ‘impervious’ to flooding, is free of the environmental precarities and Arcadian revenge seen in Rith and its surrounding areas earlier in the novel (52). Carhullan’s vision of a renewed relationship between ‘human and feral’, and its resistance to the environmental neglect that has prompted the aforementioned retribution of the natural world, presents a genuine societal alternative that inspires Sister’s belief in the emancipatory potential of ‘social dreaming’, as her affirmation suggests:

After technology and its failures, after the monumental mistakes of the industrialized world, human beings could still shelter and survive in rudimentary ways, just as they always had. Independent communities were possible. Alternative societies. Something durable and extraordinary could be created in these mountains (55).

While Jackie’s eventual militarism, and exhibition of the dystopian potential of Utopia, ultimately undermines Carhullan’s credentials as a utopian space, Sister’s affirmation of such ‘microtopian’ environmental possibilities evidences a potent anticipatory consciousness for realisable eco-topian alternatives – belying the dogma that ‘T.I.N.A’, and suggesting that *The Carhullan Army*’s active and engaged ‘environmental dystopianism’ is one in which the utopian impulse plays, perhaps necessarily, a fundamental role.

Just as the sustainable, ecologically-friendly alternatives practiced at Carhullan point towards thinkable, realizable and radically better environmental futures, its democratic traditions and practices – while tainted by the underlying police order of Jackie’s militaristic approach – represent a critical utopian desire for a transformation of a political arena defined

by the depoliticising nationalist propaganda and coercive ideological hegemony of the novel's dystopian Britain. Prior to the suspension of Carhullan's 'formal discussions and debates' ahead of the Sisterhood's revolution and assault on Rith, they form the basis of a renewed political space that opposes the anti-democratic status quo of their present moment (109). This status quo, in the novel, begins with Britain's political establishment, as we learn of the suspension of parliamentary debate broadcasts and the executive approval of legislations enabled by the parliament's approval of the Unrestricted Powers Act. Here, *The Carhullan Army* not only presents a dystopian extrapolation of the ways in which parliamentary processes may be bypassed, or the ways in which parliamentary transparency can be undermined, in the face of emerging crises – it critiques modes of parliamentary conduct in contemporary British politics that contribute to a democratic deficit and weakening of practices through which government is traditionally held to account. Sister's memories of such parliamentary conduct evidence this critique, as she recalls 'hearing some of the debates in the old Houses of Parliament on [her] father's radio [...] They were torrid and wasteful affairs, conducted by obtuse politicians, interrupted by jeers and barracking, and filled with disparaging comments' (109-110). The democratic standards and customs of debates at Carhullan seek to redress the wastefulness and opacity of parliamentary standards of the past and present, as a lost form of authentic political speech and action is retrieved and protected:

At Carhullan things were startlingly different. Disagreements were expressed through uninterrupted statements and anyone butting in forfeited their right to speak that night. Women took turns to put forward an idea or a problem, one after the other, and then there was a rebuttal or agreement. Occasionally something might be put to a vote. The speakers presented their views concisely or a length, depending on who was speaking and what was being said. Meanwhile a hush from the others was expected. The room listened. Whoever chaired the meeting did so with a firm but fair hand (110)

This fostering of democratic engagement and participation can be understood as a ‘microtopian’ reconstruction of democratic political space; while it is ‘critically’ utopian in the seeds of dystopia that are evidenced within the militaristic fundamentalism that Sister grows to recognise in Jackie’s increasingly dictatorial presence, it nonetheless sees a ‘minor’ utopian expression of desire for a radically better, more democratic political space. Where the novel’s vision of Britain illustrates a dystopian inversion of the Thatcherite and Blairite ‘consensus politics’ described by Heffernan, Carhullan’s political space does not seek to eliminate the inefficiencies and routine contestations of democratic politics. Sister notes that Carhullan ‘appeared on one level to be efficient and united’ but was perceptibly ‘fraught on others’, with disagreements and disputes a recurring feature of the bi-monthly democratic forums (111). Despite their ‘differences of opinion and different roles’, however, the women of Carhullan remain a tight community, respectful of each other and mutually helpful; in contrast to the fundamentalism of dystopian Britain’s socio-political consensus, Jackie argues that ‘the beauty up here is that we can disagree, we have the space, we have the time’ (133; 155). While Sister feels that the renewed political space ‘broke down the walls that had kept [the Sisterhood] contained’, Jackie’s own fundamentalism and militaristic regulation of an alternative ‘police order’ ultimately proves to be the undoing of the microtopian possibilities presented by Carhullan’s reconstruction of democratic political space – an undoing evidenced not in the suspension of the debates ahead of the Sisterhood’s assault on the Authority’s base in Rith, but in the hierarchies, exclusions and disempowering elements that her rule by militaristic ‘police order’ involves (187).

Sister’s ‘Speaking Back’: Resistance and the Politics of Dissensus

Within *The Carhullan Army*'s illustration of a dystopian political space, Sister's descriptions of the quotidian effects of 'precarization', socio-economic insecurity and biopolitical domination are consistently linked by conceptions of voicelessness. Early in the novel Sister discloses that she often looked to Andrew 'for a reason, for a *voice*' and that she 'had not yet found a voice with which to make [her] arguments [...] It still lay somewhere inside [her], unexpressed, growing angrier' (25, 33; italics mine). In Rancièrian terms, this voicelessness that results from the exclusionary hierarchies of the 'police order' that governs the official zones of dystopian Britain is one that is both specific to the female citizens rendered unequal and excluded from political space by the Authority's oppressive legislative reforms, and one that is, more broadly, a goal of the depoliticising propaganda and ideological apparatus that safeguards the consensus that 'There is No Alternative' to present realities. The success of these strategies of depoliticisation and domination, in the latter sense, can be seen in Sister's description of Andrew's eventual renouncing of his own voice: 'he simply lost faith and the energy to resist [...] As time went by he became less *outspoken*' (30; italics mine). Whereas Sister had struggled to find a coherent voice of her own when 'venting [her] half-formed opinions' in Rith, she finds in Carhullan that Jackie's voice 'clarified [her] thoughts', and that 'her voice was the one I had always been listening for inside my own head' (24; 162). While Sister is emboldened by Jackie's voice, and her own resistance to the Authority, it is ultimately the microtopian possibilities of a reconstructed democratic space that finally enables Sister to reclaim her voice and – as a consequence – her selfhood and political subjectivity. Her first speech at a Carhullan debate evidences the vital moment where the voicelessness that results from her socio-economic and existential precariousness is, at last, overcome: 'My voice trembled as I began to speak, but the words came more easily than I thought they would, and I did not feel afraid [...] The heat of the fire at my back warmed the red embers inside me' (119). The glowing embers of Sister's emboldened voice subsequently

mark the analeptic opening and defiant close of the novel, in her definitive statements that '[y]ou will call me Sister', that '[t]his is just the beginning', and that 'I do not recognise the jurisdiction of this government' (5, 207). In these opening and closing statements, we can evidence a form of the 'speaking back' described in Tom Moylan's argument for the ability of dystopian subjects to 'recover the ability to [...] "speak back" to hegemonic power', and a moment of Rancièrian dissensus that intervenes in the hegemonic power of the Authority's destructive 'police order' (Moylan 2000: 149).

Intervening in the collective voicelessness of the oppressed in Rith, and in 'all the silences' that have enabled the Authority's destructive consensus to prevail, Sister's speaking back to hegemonic power represents a 'permanent singular refusal' that enables her to begin the transition from a state of precarious subjugation to one of active political subjectivity (32). In *State of Insecurity*, Lorey argues that through '*permanent singular refusals*, the small sabotages and resistances of precarious everyday life, a potentiality emerges that subverts the disciplining of governmental precarization time and again' (Lorey: 111; italics mine). These 'permanent singular refusals' can, for Lorey, be interpreted as interventions and struggles both 'over the forms of governing as well as over living conditions and ways of thinking' (Lorey: 111). It is not only through the dissensual act of 'speaking back' that Sister enacts such permanent singular refusals in *The Carhullan Army*; such action can be identified in her escape from Rith, and her refusal to use contraceptives issued by the Authority – a resistance she considers to be 'the only protest left for us' (26). Hall's representation of Sister's 'speaking back' in *The Carhullan Army*, however, does not simply provide an individual narrative of 'silence-breaking' within an oppressive, misogynistic political space; understood as an act of dissensus, this speaking back instead provides a focused direction for active engagement in the transformation of the destructive forms of consensus that enable inequalities, exclusion and injustices within the socio-political spaces of contemporary

Britain.⁶⁶ Sister's reclamation of speech and appearance as a political subject sees a dismantling of the 'police order' – best defined here as the 'order of the visible and sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as *discourse* and another as *noise*' – of her dystopian Britain (Rancière 1995/1999: 29; italics mine). *The Carhullan Army* evidences Sister's turning of speech from mere 'noise' to a potent 'speaking back' that disrupts the destructive, exclusionary hierarchies of the Authority's police order and enacts an inherently Rancièrian form of 'the political'. Stephen Corcoran notes that, for Rancière, politics (*la politique*) 'is precisely an activity that overturns every such reduction of the people to the population and of politics to an affair of government' (Rancière 2010/2013: 5). In *The Carhullan Army*, the dissensus enacted by 'speaking back' – both in terms of Sister's speaking back to the hegemonic power that has oppressed and excluded her, and in terms of the novel's own 'activity' of dissensus and intervention in its present socio-political moment – ultimately performs the Rancièrian 'political', as the structures that have reduced 'the people' to a dominated, depoliticised population and politics to an affair of a 'government of the precarious' are resisted (Rancière 2010/2013: 5).

Concluding Remarks

In his analysis of the impact of Hannah Arendt's thought on the manipulation of history within the 'age of propaganda' for utopian studies, Alexandre Franco de Sá considers

⁶⁶ The 'silence-breaking' mentioned here refers to Adrienne Rich's argument that '[b]reaking the silences, telling our tales, is not enough [...] We can value the process — and the courage it may require — without believing that it is an end in itself' (Sawicki, 308). As Jana Sawicki notes in her feminist theoretical perspective on Rich's argument, while 'using our voices and asserting ourselves in the face of the violence and trauma associated with oppression sometimes seems radical enough when compared to our silences and submissions', the genuine political implications of individual narratives of such forms of silence-breaking rest in their 'being collectively analyzed and strategically deployed in feminist political struggles' (Sawicki, 308). Here, in my Rancièrian reading of *The Carhullan Army*'s vision of Sister's 'speaking back', I would suggest that Hall is not simply representing an individual narrative of silence-breaking within a misogynistic, patriarchal political arena – rather, the novel's illustration of this 'speaking back', as an activity of dissensus, constitutes an act that seeks to actively transform the political arena itself.

Arendt's focus on the 'loss of the utopian ability to anticipate the future, the ability to "begin something new"' (Franco de Sá: 28). In 'Truth and Politics', Arendt argues that when the past and present are destabilised, and rendered malleable by untruth and propaganda, the political realm 'is deprived not only of its main stabilizing force but of the starting point from which to change, to begin something new' (Arendt 1993: 258; Franco de Sá: 28). The concern that unifies *The Carhullan Army*'s complex dystopian vision of a Britain where ideology, propaganda and nationalist rhetoric have enabled a socio-economic and political consensus that 'There is No Alternative' – to radical economic Austerity, socio-political insecurity and environmental fragility – is, I argue, precisely this Arendtian concern for the political features of the present moment that endanger the individual and collective means of effecting societal change. *The Carhullan Army*, as this chapter has suggested, recognises such dangers in both 'Austerity' – understood not only in terms of the policy agendas, programmatic reforms and neoliberal 'narratives of recovery' that Rebecca Bramall has identified in contemporary discourses of economic austerity, but as an ideological phenomenon with the potential to cultivate a depoliticising consensus politics – and in the identifiably contemporary phenomenon of a self-regulating, governmental and intersubjective 'precariousness' proposed by Isabell Lorey's study *State of Insecurity*. *The Carhullan Army* envisions 'Austerity', in line with Bramall's study, as a 'terrain on and through which the future will be founded', and presciently extrapolates on the consequences that it may entail for Britain's economic, environmental and political futures (Bramall, 138). In the novel's representation of moments of dissensus and resistance to the consensus politics enabled by a radically dystopian version of economic austerity and a coercive, biopolitical 'government of the precarious', we can identify its utopian desire for a protection of the socio-political means of this Arendtian form of 'beginn[ing] something new'. Reflecting Jackie's scorn at 'governing politicians', and her questioning of whether 'the environment they were creating was

acceptable', the novel focuses its dystopian critique on contemporary socio-economic and political manifestations of the maxim that 'There is No Alternative', and locates realizable 'minor' utopian alternatives in an environmental politics of sustainability, the fostering of democratic political space, and the eradication of socio-economic and political precariousness as the predominant mode of intersubjectivity (51). In this sense, the novel's ending is perhaps best interpreted not simply with a focus on the note of resistance of its closing line, and Sister's refusal to 'recognise the jurisdiction' of Britain's dystopian government, but in the affirmation that precedes it – that '[t]his is just the beginning' (207).

At the outset of the novel, Sister's reflects on her escape from Rith and wonders:

Maybe when he woke, Andrew would guess the truth – that all the silences, all the tensions, had been leading to something like this. That it went past upset over the new rule of law, the housing conditions, the uterine regulator that had been inserted. He would remember all the arguments, just as I was thinking of them now, hearing the echo of our raised voices (32-33).

Sister's transgression of both the physical boundaries and the regulatory framework of the 'police order' imposed on a precarious Britain by the Authority neatly relates to *The Carhullan Army*'s dystopian critical position – and engagement with the Rancièrian 'activity' of dissensus – as a whole. The novel's dystopian vision, inclusive of its presence within the troubled 'critical' utopian space of Carhullan, expresses a concern that 'all the silences' and 'all the tensions' of our socio-political present will lead to 'something like' Sister's radically dystopian Britain – a society where a tyrannical rule of law, unaccountable political governance, reckless environmental policies, systemic violence against women and socio-economic inequality is commonplace. *The Carhullan Army*'s implicit hope, however, is that – unlike Andrew – we will awake to 'guess the truth' of the destination of our economic, ecological and political directions and begin to transform them for the better. Hall, as I have argued, represents and engages with forms of dissensus – most notably the 'speaking back' evidenced in the novel – a speaking that the resounding 'echo of [...] raised voices' of the

above passage foreshadows at the beginning of the novel. In Sister's reclamation of political subjectivity – most notably evidenced in her speech of dissent at the novel's close – we can recognise a 'redistribution of the sensible' that reintroduces the voice of the female subject to the political space of appearance that it had been denied in the novel. Crucially, this 'speaking back' supports the fundamental Rancièrian claim that a moment of the 'political' (*la politique*) within socio-political space renders it open for heterogeneity, equality and possibility to emerge – the task, as this dystopian novel's own 'speaking back' suggests, is to ensure that the political arena remains open and heterogeneous in order that space is created for political subjects to continually resist and transform the conditions, hierarchies and discourses that exclude, oppress and render unequal.

Chapter Three

Depoliticisation and the Disunity of Consensus in J.G. Ballard's *Kingdom Come*

J.G. Ballard's oeuvre of experimental, apocalyptic and dystopian writing evidences a set of extrapolations of socio-cultural and political visions that has both shaped and challenged the post-war and contemporary British dystopian imagination. From the apocalyptic visions and ecological catastrophes imagined in *The Wind from Nowhere* (1961) and *The Drowned World* (1962), the radical critiques of modern British society in *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High Rise* (1975), to Ballard's late-twentieth and early twenty-first century turn to the psychosocial underpinnings of a prospective dystopian near-future, Ballard identifies and interrogates a multifarious set of discontents at the heart of contemporary civilization. Following his arrival in post-war England as a child in 1946, and his initial impressions of the 'derelict, dark and half-ruined' landscape that ultimately fuelled his literary imagination, Ballard has vividly and controversially depicted England's 'entropic decline', as Roger Luckhurst has argued (Ballard 2008: 122; Luckhurst: 425). In *Apocalyptic Fiction* (2017) Andrew Tate considers the 'curious biblical connection' between Ballard's first and final novels, *The Drowned World* from 1962 and *Kingdom Come* from 2006, suggesting that Ballard's invocation of the Lord's Prayer and God's kingdom in the title of his last novel connects it to the Judeo-Christian eschatology of his first (Tate: 24-25).⁶⁷ Tate's insight further supports a location of

⁶⁷ Tate cites *The Drowned World* (1962) as Ballard's 'debut' novel, which aligns with Ballard's own dismissal of *The Wind From Nowhere* (1961) as 'a piece of hackwork' in a 1975 interview with David Pringle (Tate: 24; Sellars: par.4). As Toby Litt has suggested, Ballard's eagerness to disregard *The Wind From Nowhere* arguably emerges from a retrospective antipathy towards the elemental unity of his first four novels, i.e.: *The Wind From Nowhere* (air/wind); *The Drowned World* (water); *The Burning World* (1964; fire); *The Crystal World* (1966; earth) (Litt: 2007).

Ballard within the wave of twentieth century writers of speculative fiction whose work has meaningfully undermined the generic boundaries between dystopian and (post-)apocalyptic fiction. While images of environmental deterioration and ecological crisis do not dominate the settings of Ballard's late fictions in the same way as those of his early work, the allusive echo of the apocalyptic imaginary highlighted by Tate brings a renewed significance to a reading of *Estrella de Mar*, *Eden-Olympia*, *Chelsea Marina* and *Brooklands* as suitably myopic, pre-apocalyptic settings where the melting of ice caps, damage to the ozone layer and increasingly visible effects of climate change are disavowed by populations fixated by the lure of consumerism, technology and psychopathy.

Ballard's twenty-first century fictions – *Super-Cannes* (2000), *Millennium People* (2003) and *Kingdom Come* (2006) – each envision versions of the 'dystopian modernity' that is commonly recognised as a defining feature of the 'Ballardian' speculative imagination.⁶⁸ The postmillennial novels (along with the earlier *Cocaine Nights*, from 1996), however, evidence an increasing focus on the psychological – or, more specifically, psychopathological – underpinnings of the dystopian elements of twenty-first century society. In *Super-Cannes*, regarded as a companion novel to *Cocaine Nights*, the novel's protagonist, Paul Sinclair, moves to Eden-Olympia, a hyper-technological business park in the hills above Cannes where his wife is to replace the previous clinic doctor, David Greenwood, who died there in the spring. Greenwood's death is shrouded in mystery and horror, following his blaze of glory and subsequent 'suicide' (CN: 9). Racked with boredom and suspicion, Sinclair retraces Greenwood's bloody trail from that May morning, and soon discovers that all is not as it

⁶⁸ This critical and cultural consensus on the Ballardian imagination's representation of a dystopian modernity is appropriately reflected by the *Collins English Dictionary* definition of 'Ballardian: (adj) 1. of James Graham Ballard (J.G. Ballard; born 1930), the British novelist, or his works. (2) resembling or suggestive of the conditions described in Ballard's novels & stories, esp. dystopian modernity, bleak man-made landscapes & the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments'. ('Ballardian (adj)'. *Collins Dictionary Online*. Web. 12 October 2016. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/ballardian?showCookiePolicy=true>)

appears on the sleek surface of modern life at Eden-Olympia. Beneath the utopian ideals and prosperity of the exclusive resort lies a brutal undercurrent of violence, illegal sexual solicitation, drugs and a deadening stasis. The organised psychopathy of Eden-Olympia's vigilante mob of the night proves to be an extreme cathartic release, one which enables the smooth running of a culture of perpetual work by day. Sinclair escapes the lure of Eden-Olympia's unsettling mysteries in time to save his now estranged wife, and to finish the mission that the deceased Greenwood had begun. Ballard's final two novels, *Millennium People* (2003) and *Kingdom Come* (2006), are set in the English suburbs of Chelsea Marina and Brooklands, respectively. David Ian Paddy, in his work *The Empires of J.G. Ballard* (2015), argues that both novels 'can be considered contemporary variations on the Condition of England novel' (Paddy: 286). *Millennium People* begins with David Markham's reflection upon the recent revolt and attempted revolution at Chelsea Marina. Markham's ex-wife Laura had recently been killed in a terrorist bombing at Heathrow, and the shock of her death leads Markham to become embroiled with London's new revolutionaries, headed by enigmatic leaders like Richard Gould and Kay Churchill. In the novel, Ballard depicts the ways in which England's middle classes are revolting against societal structures that endorse passivity, docility and unfreedom. The revolutionary activities take various forms, from crowd protests to a select group's terror-bombings of London's cultural landmarks. Markham's quest to uncover the murky truth about Laura's death, and his intrigue with Chelsea Marina's 'revolution' become intertwined when it transpires that the culprit of the Heathrow bombing is closer than he realizes, in the form of the enigmatic Dr Gould. Markham's risky associations very nearly jeopardize his and Sally's safety, however police find and kill chief terrorists Gould and Vera Blackburn before it is too late, leaving Markham to reflect on the meaning of middle-class England's chaotic revolution at the novel's close.

In *Kingdom Come*, Ballard's interrogation of the present 'condition' of England presciently extrapolates on how prevailing forms of consensus surrounding immigration, national identity, crowd violence and socio-political disenchantment might impact upon twenty-first century Britain's near-future. In a 2007 interview with Jeannette Baxter, Ballard broadly reflects on the condition of England, stating that:

the 'no-place' where history, politics and morality are absent is certainly a special kind of nightmare utopia, and it's one we have been moving towards for the past century. We have fewer and fewer moral decisions to make [...] In fact, one could live today without making any moral decisions at all – that part of our lives has been subcontracted to the DHSS⁶⁹ and the Home Office. There is a huge vacuum in people's lives, and what will fill it? (Baxter, 124)

In *Kingdom Come*, Ballard, I argue, explores this contemporary vacuum and responds to his own foreboding question by conceiving of a near-future where unfettered consumerism, psychopathological violence and a dangerous nationalism have filled the void at the heart of the British 'nightmare utopia'. The novel describes Richard Pearson's journey to the suburban district of Brooklands, following an incident where his estranged father had been gunned down in an apparently spontaneous lunchtime shooting in the Brooklands Metro-Centre. Following the alleged killer's controversial release from police custody, Pearson develops an awareness that the unfolding drama around him has been orchestrated by the very people who ensured that the killer was set free. Searching for answers about his father's opaque recent past, Richard begins to survey the dangerous undercurrents at Brooklands only to find pervasive elements of racist intimidation, football hooliganism, and a chilling hyper-culture that has enabled consumerism to slide effortlessly in to a fascism. However, the hyper-culture-in-flux generated by the Metro-Centre, a cathedral-like shopping nirvana, gradually captivates Pearson himself, whose previous career in advertising prompts him to be seduced

⁶⁹ The Department for Health and Social Security. The DHSS was, in fact, restructured and renamed in 1988 by Margaret Thatcher's government (i.e. split in to the Department of Health and the Department of Social Security), however Ballard is here referring to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) established on the 8th June 2001 following New Labour's successful re-election to government.

by the lure of its spectacle. He collaborates with David Cruise, who becomes the poster boy for a new marketing campaign – that of revolution and a ‘new politics’ (196). This new politics takes effect in a rebellion and standoff between police authorities and a Metro-Centre based resistance, during which the ‘Republic of the Metro Centre’ is briefly formed. This shopping-centre republic, a microcosm of the ‘society of the spectacle’ that the novel’s Britain has become, eventually goes up in flames following a bathetic coup. Pearson discovers the unreality and chaos at the heart of the ‘herd game’ orchestrated by the revolt’s leaders through his experiences witnessing spectacles of violence and the far-right wing movement’s intimidation of minorities, and at the novel’s close contemplates the coming of further unrest and violence ‘unless the sane woke’ and rallied themselves to action (280).

This chapter begins by examining the ‘vacuum’ of contemporary British society presented in *Kingdom Come*, with a particular focus on Ballard’s diagnosis of the dystopian potential of elements of both the neoliberal economic and political consensus of twenty-first century British politics and that of the ‘imagined communities’ constructed by divisive nationalist ideologies.⁷⁰ As Graham Matthews has argued, the novel depicts a British society where ‘the individual is offered freedom of choice but limited in political agency’, and where politics and parliamentary democracy ‘fail[s] to inspire the populace’ (Matthews: 135). Amidst *Kingdom Come*’s illustration of a weakened political sphere, section one identifies a radical form of ‘depoliticisation’ as the unifying force within the novel’s critical vision of disempowered crowds, disenfranchised citizens and a political establishment that routinely produces systemic inequalities and societal exclusions. I subsequently investigate the novel’s exploration of a British society experiencing a profound collective insecurity concerning its national identity, and consider the socio-political critiques evident within Ballard’s narrative

⁷⁰ I here refer to Benedict Anderson’s argument – from *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) – that a nation is ‘an imagined political community’ (Anderson, 6).

of how the leaders of a far-right movement ignite a struggling socio-political imagination with divisive and depoliticising nationalist imaginaries. In the second of the chapter's three sections, I contend that *Kingdom Come* effectively evidences Ballard's critical literary response to his own open-ended question regarding what will fill the societal 'vacuum' he identifies within early twenty-first century British society. Firstly, I analyse the ways in which the empty utopian promise of consumerism and the illusory forms of belonging created by the Debordian 'society of the spectacle' that dominates life at Brooklands each temporarily satisfy the void created by depoliticisation and disenfranchisement in the novel. In Debord's conception of the 'lonely crowd', from his influential *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), I locate key characteristics that connect both forms of the Ballardian crowd evidenced in *Kingdom Come*: the crowds of consumers that flood the retail paradise of the Metro-Centre; and the violently rioting crowds whose destruction has been the subject of much critical attention to date. As Matthews has argued, Ballard's late fictions often imaginatively suggest that, rather than destroying communities, the spectacle of violence instead plays 'a vital role in producing communities and maintaining social cohesion' (Matthews, 124). In this section, I subsequently examine the ways in which the Ballardian 'lonely crowd' finds a means of filling the void created by a socio-political vacuum through spectacles of violence, and – via the theoretical work of Debord, Canetti and Žižek – I argue that these spectacles of violence not only represent a dystopian means of maintaining social cohesion, or the 'contemporary psychopathies' identified in the work of Gasiorek and Francis, but that such spectacles of violence illustrate a symbolic rejection of systemic violence and the hierarchies and exclusions that have alienated the individuals of the Ballardian lonely crowd.⁷¹ In the chapter's third and final section, I conduct a Rancièrian reading of Ballard's illustrations of

⁷¹ See (respectively): (i) chapter six of Andrzej Gasiorek's *J.G. Ballard* (2005), pp. 202-212; and (ii) chapter five of Simon Francis, *The Psychological Fictions of J.G. Ballard* (2011), pp. 155-183.

a depoliticised and deeply divided Brooklands community in *Kingdom Come*. Following my theoretically-informed analysis of the novel's visions of how destructive forms of the 'police order' are fundamental to the regulatory framework of a dystopian political space, I evidence the ways in which participation in crowds and spectacles of violence come to represent 'facile' forms of dissensus. While the crowd's symbolic rejection of the hierarchies, inequalities or exclusions that have alienated them is suggestive of a dissensual disruption of the consensus of their police order, my analysis demonstrates that they – as a disempowered *ochlos* – are ultimately complicit in the exacerbation of a police order that equally marginalises and excludes the immigrant Other.

This chapter seeks to contribute to recent critical work that has examined the political nuances of the late fictions, and proposes new theoretically-informed readings of Ballard's twenty-first century dystopian imagination. Much existing critical work on the novel has focused on *Kingdom Come*'s depiction of the pivot between consumerism and fascism, and the mutual characteristics of both; this chapter begins its critical and close readings of the novel from the position that consumerism and fascism are shown to be fundamentally connected by the strategic depoliticisation that safeguards – via the regulatory frameworks of Ballard's dystopian illustration of a destructive Rancièrian police order – a stultifying socio-political consensus. My analysis of Ballard's depictions of the 'lonely crowd' and its participation in spectacles of violence is engaged with the existing work of Graham Matthews, Jake Huntley and Samuel Francis on crowd violence, community and psychopathy in *Kingdom Come*, and argues for a closer connection between the two distinct forms of crowds that Ballard imagines in the novel – i.e. consumer crowds and violent, rioting crowds – than has been critically acknowledged to date. In the chapter's connections of Ballard's interview remarks on the socio-cultural and political contexts of twenty-first century Britain with *Kingdom Come*'s probing dystopian visions of societal inequalities and exclusions, my

critical interpretation ultimately supports Alexander Beaumont's challenge to the simple characterisation of Ballard as an 'ahistorical voyeur', or a mere political pessimist (Beaumont: 127). In *Contemporary British Fiction and the Cultural Politics of Disenfranchisement: Freedom and the City* (2015), Beaumont argues against the 'apoliticism' that is often critically assumed of the Ballardian imagination, instead reading the ways in which late fictions such as *Cocaine Nights* and *Super Cannes* are engaged in 'an earnest critique of the postpolitical settlement of the 1990s' (Beaumont: 95). As Paddy's 2015 study of Englishness and the far-right challenge to British identity in *Kingdom Come*, and Dini's 2018 article on Ballard's nuanced critiques of neoliberalism's 'anthropogenic waste' in the postmillennial fictions equally suggest, Ballard's late dystopian critical position is one that is closely attuned to its contemporary socio-political moment.⁷² This chapter seeks to build on this recent critical momentum with a particular attention to Ballard's complex and meaningful illustrations of the crowd, and to *Kingdom Come*'s interrogation of the dystopian potential that unchecked depoliticisation strategies and prevailing inequalities and exclusions may hold for twenty-first century Britain.

The Contemporary Vacuum: Identity and the Politics of Depoliticisation

Despite Paddy's argument for *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come* as twenty-first century instances of the 'Condition of England' novel in *The Empires of J.G. Ballard*, Ballard – in an interview with Jeannette Baxter – denies that there is much evidence or concern with 'Englishness' in *Kingdom Come*.⁷³ He does, however, admit that 'there is England, the

⁷² See David Ian Paddy (2015) *The Empires of J.G. Ballard: An Imagined Geography*. Canterbury: Gylphi; and Rachele Dini (2018) "'The Problem of This Trash Society': Anthropogenic Waste and the Neoliberal City in *Super-Cannes*, *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come*". *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*. 6(1). pp. 1–26.

⁷³ Paddy, p.286; Baxter, p.123.

England of 2006 and the motorway towns, that new England of the retail park and CCTV camera that Thatcher and Blair both wooed' (Baxter, 123). Identifying broken political promises and taking aim at a culture of political 'spin' and that developed under New Labour, Ballard argues that that 'the Blair premiership suggests that we will like being lied to, that we prefer promises that will never be kept' (Baxter: 124).⁷⁴ Ballard's critique of the Blair administration suggests that the 'new politics' repeatedly referred to in *Kingdom Come*, even taking the name of its twenty-first chapter, pointedly alludes to the 'New Politics for the New Century' that became the rhetorical basis of New Labour's political philosophy and party manifestos of the mid-late 1990s.⁷⁵ Ballard depicts an alienating, untruthful political sphere in the novel, and an uncanny dystopian middle England living with the consequences of a 'politics of depoliticisation', representing a radical dystopian acceleration of the depoliticisation strategies that Peter Burnham identifies in New Labour's governance under Blair's leadership. Burnham, writing in 2001, states that:

'depoliticisation' should not be taken to mean the direct removal of politics from social and economic spheres or the simple withdrawal of political power or influence. Rather, depoliticisation is understood here as a governing strategy and, in that sense, remains highly political. As a form of statecraft, depoliticisation can be defined as *the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making*. In many respects, state managers retain arm's-length control over crucial economic processes whilst benefiting from the distancing effect of depoliticisation. Furthermore, depoliticisation strategies invariably require the public rejigging of bureaucratic practices to achieve their primary aim, which is to change expectations regarding the effectiveness and credibility of policymaking (136).

Burnham proceeds to argue that, in contemporary Britain, depoliticisation strategies 'enable the government to: off-load responsibility for unpopular policies; capitalise on recent changes in the global political economy; and impose financial discipline on labour and capital whilst in theory retaining electoral support' (Burnham, 137). During his interview with Baxter,

⁷⁴ Ballard is equally as scathing in his criticisms of the Conservative Party in a 2001 interview with Wakefield, where he argues that 'the old Tory view of England is locked in the past now, and is of no use to anyone' (Wakefield: 23).

⁷⁵ Blair's Fabian Society pamphlet, *The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century* (1998), is the most direct example of this rhetorical base, or political outlook.

Ballard's scathing remarks on Blair's premiership address this 'highly political' removal of political character from key socio-economic processes; a technique that, alongside a careful strategic approach to public relations and the media, ultimately resulted in the political culture of spin and 'broken promises' identified by Ballard in his interview with Baxter. While the depoliticisation strategies explored in *Kingdom Come* primarily take the form of the simpler 'direct removal of politics from social [...] spheres' noted by Burnham, the novel's consistent focus on a depoliticising 'new politics' and a national disillusionment with traditional establishment politics supports, I argue, a reading of Ballard's critical dystopian interrogation of the causes and effects of depoliticisation as a governance strategy in contemporary Britain.

In *Kingdom Come*, Ballard investigates the hegemonic power that creates and maintains processes of radical depoliticisation in the novel's vision of dystopian Britain. Ballard creates, in the volatile psychogeographical environment of Brooklands, an experimental arena where the depoliticisation of the public sphere has given a dangerous potency to the facile utopian promise of consumerism and the hollow forms of belonging offered by a far-right nationalism and the routine recreational violence of crowds. Central to the novel's development is Ballard's illustration of advertising executive Pearson's vocational curiosity with the insidious methods of order and control behind the apparent chaos at Brooklands. Early in the novel, Pearson abhors the reckless behaviour of the Brooklands crowds, the rhetorical defence of the Metro-Centre's depoliticising elements by figures like Tom Carradine, and the evasive, opaque dealings of Fairfax, Maxted and Sangster as they incite crowd violence and influence local judicial matters. At the root of the power politics at play in *Kingdom Come*'s dystopian vision of British suburbia is a fundamental mistrust in traditional establishment politics, a rift that has created the vacuum for the 'new politics' that is, according to the writings of Pearson's father, a 'herd game' (196). Competing to sway the powerful 'herd' alongside the veiled leaders of the revolt, Fairfax, Maxted and

Sangster, is the celebrity figurehead of the Metro-Centre's cultural revolution, David Cruise. In an interview for his cable television channel, Cruise later claims that the Metro Centre and its suppliers 'probably do a better job of representing your real interests than your Member of Parliament' (78). The sentiment is so widespread that Brooklands' local constituency chairman supports the idea of Cruise serving as a Member of Parliament for the constituency, a prospect that underlines the deterioration of political and public spheres to entertainment-driven spectacle in the novel (46). The Metro-Centre's public relations manager, Tom Carradine, equally supports Cruise's candidacy and the cultivation of the post-political malaise that consolidates the Metro-Centre's socio-political hegemony, stating that: 'Today's politics is tailor-made for him [...] Smiles leaking everywhere, mood music, the sales campaign that gets rid of the need for a product [...] Even the shiftiness [...] People like to be conned' (46). Ballard's criticisms of Blair and New Labour's alleged dishonesty and broken political promises suggest that *Kingdom Come*'s depiction of Cruise's brand of politics represents a radical extrapolation of the political present in which the novel was written. Described by Maxted as a 'virtual politics unconnected to any reality', Cruise's prospective political party represents a dystopian post-politics of 'spin' and spectacle (100). Echoing the rhetoric of figureheads such as Prime Minister Bliss in Gee's *The Flood* (2004) and Michael Song in Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* (2005), Cruise's political *modus operandi* ensures that the British public 'willingly colludes in its own deception' by fabricating messages of promise that are 'Fleeting impressions, an illusion of meaning floating over a sea of undefined emotions' (100). Capitalising on the depoliticisation of a 'deceived' people who are disaffected from the traditional establishment politics that has abdicated its role in public life, Cruise's televised addresses only consolidate the decay of the public sphere and the opacity of its socio-political discourses. The subversive dishonesty at the heart of local and national structures of governance highlight a profound sense of disenfranchisement with

public and political spheres in *Kingdom Come*, with Sangster even reflecting Ballard's own aforementioned allegation that New Labour's prevailing consensus assumes that we 'will like being lied to' during his meeting with Pearson: 'we need drama, we need our emotions manipulated, we want to be conned and cajoled' (168).

Despite the frequent public outings of tumultuous crowds, protestors or far-right nationalist groups in St. George's uniforms, no meaningful public discourse is discernible in *Kingdom Come*'s dystopian Britain, where political speech is reserved for entertainment television and spectacle, and genuine political action is relegated to mindless rioting and the violent 'cleansing' of heterogeneity and ethnic diversity (KC, 12; 78). Throughout the novel, Ballard hints at the media's complicity in the cycle of oppression and violence against minorities in Brooklands. Following a recent surge of attacks on Asian businesses and immigrant communities, Pearson observes that 'almost nothing appeared in the national press, where the incidents were lumped in with accounts of sporting violence and binge drinking in provincial towns' (79). In his interview with Jeannette Baxter, Ballard echoes *Kingdom Come*'s misgivings about the media's complicity in the weakening of the traditional 'public sphere' of contemporary Britain, arguing that 'Language today is almost devoid of meaning, especially in the public sphere [...] This has been going on for a very long time, ever since politicians noticed the power of mass-circulation newspapers' (Baxter, 124-125). Aiding and abetting consumerism, fascism and recreational violence, the media and its depoliticising narratives satisfy the profound national 'longing for a faith beyond politics' in Pearson's Britain – all the while enabling the insidious depoliticisation strategies of both the Metro Centre and the Brooklands coalition of far-right revolutionaries (177). This longing for a 'faith' beyond a now-unreal and alienating form of politics has resulted in both a stultifying void, typically filled by the vacuous promise of consumerism and an anger towards the political structures that have failed a disenfranchised Brooklands community, as Maxted

suggests: ‘Politics is a racket, and democracy is just another utility, like gas and electricity [...] Almost no-one has any civic feeling’ (102). This democratic deficit and absence of ‘civic feeling’ is further emphasised by Geoffrey Fairfax in the book’s fourth chapter. Fairfax, the solicitor and associate of Pearson’s father, describes how the Metro-Centre and its insidious consumer culture has ruptured the values and way of life at Brooklands:

‘Our schools are plagued by truancy [...] The one hospital which should be caring for local residents is overwhelmed by driving accidents caused by visitors [...] No-one attends church [...] We had a dozen societies and clubs – music, amateur dramatics, archaeology [...] They shut down long ago [...] Charities, political parties? No one turns up’. (32-33)

Pearson affirms that ‘It all sounds terrible [...] rather like the rest of England’, revealing that the socio-political malaise and death of ‘civic feeling’ is a nation-wide phenomenon (33). This vacuum, or depoliticised state of consensus, is the result of the ‘racket’ of political governance that has ceded its interest in public life to the Metro-Centre and, in doing so, enabled the St George’s brigade to revive a lost ‘civic feeling’ through destructive nationalism and racist violence.

Reflecting upon the unreality of contemporary suburban life at Brooklands, *Kingdom Come*’s protagonist asserts that: ‘Like English life as a whole, nothing in Brooklands could be taken at face value’ (77). Pearson here reflects a prominent remark from Ballard’s insightful interview with Baxter:

there have of course been enormous shifts in notions of Englishness – higher expectations, better health and education, the serious prospect of an end to monarchy and the class system, but also a decline in patriotism and any sense of national purpose [...] England has changed enormously, but it now seems to be on the verge of becoming a country without a future [...] What does the United Kingdom stand for? Nothing as far as I can see. (Baxter, 123-124)

A key feature of *Kingdom Come*’s elucidation of the contemporary ‘vacuum’ is the prominent insecurity of national and collective identities, an insecurity that results in a radical binary of lack and excess in the novel. On the one hand, we frequently witness the unreality of national

identity and English life, both impossible to comprehend ‘at face value’ for a population lacking a discernible ‘sense of national purpose’, as Pearson and Ballard respectively note.⁷⁶ In contrast, ‘Englishness’ is retrieved and radicalized in the novel, resulting in the excess and violent identity politics of the St George’s brigade who brutally respond to the perceived threats of multiculturalism in their community. Writing in 1997 on ‘Ambiguous Identities’, Étienne Balibar suggests that, on the cusp of the twenty-first century, the question of nationalism ‘has become the central question of politics’ (Balibar, 56).⁷⁷ Balibar, however, argues that underlying this increasingly urgent question of nationalism and collective identity is the reality that ‘all identity is fundamentally ambiguous’ (Balibar, 57). In *Kingdom Come*’s competing extremes of the unreal and estranging nature of contemporary English life and its opposing excess of rampant nationalist demagoguery, we can evidence a fundamental ‘ambiguity’ of Englishness – a subject whose importance is, as previously noted, denied by Ballard but demonstrated by Paddy’s work in *The Empires of J.G. Ballard* (2015). In *Kingdom Come*, the ‘vacuum’ of identity in British life, and the palpable ambiguity of Englishness, enable the orchestrators of the Metro-Centre and the St George’s faction to reinforce destructive forms of belonging and a constructed nationalist identity. From the novel’s outset, the neighbourhoods and streets of Brooklands are emblazoned with flags and graffiti that, according to Pearson, suggest ‘more than a hint of paranoia’ (16). Resonating with the ‘paranoid presence’ of burly nationalists overseeing the intimidation and removal of worshippers a local mosque, the paranoiac excess of St George’s flags, British National Party

⁷⁶ Ballard’s personal view on this crisis of national identity and sense of national purpose can also be evidenced from his interview with Mary Wakefield – in particular, in the following extract: ‘The problem in England now [...] is that, with no sense of national identity to cling to, we’re all bored, and violence born of boredom is erratic and desperate. There are so few real events any more. A plane crashes in London airport but we don’t see a photograph of a single body, so we don’t feel the impact of death. People don’t die at home, they die in hospitals. In this country the coffin lid is not open; death is factored out of our lives. People are subtracted from life like contestants in Big Brother. People leave like guests in a holiday hotel who booked a week before you did and then suddenly are not there any more’ (Wakefield, 24).

⁷⁷ Balibar originally made this claim in a 1992 paper in Galicia, subsequently published in his book *La Crainte des masses* (1997) (Balibar, 73).

and Ku Klux Klan graffiti disturbingly highlight the stark imagery of vandalized shops and businesses of Asian community members (10; 16).⁷⁸ Pearson discovers the extent of the collective tension and distrust just moments in to his arrival at Brooklands, as his friendly thumbs up to a middle age couple results in the husband instinctively moves forward to protect his wife, and warningly pointing to the St George's flag on the lapel of his jacket (8). As Paddy claims, the Brooklands depicted by Ballard is 'home to an intense Little Englandism', where a deep-rooted insecurity of identity repeatedly fuels momentarily unifying revolts against the immigrant Other – a (sub)cultural logic that connects *Kingdom Come*'s vision with the violent identity politics at play in Rupert Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* (Paddy, 327).

Nationalism, in its most aggressive and divisive form, provides the fractured community of isolated individuals at Brooklands with a sense of community, strength and unity at a time of uncertainty and crisis – not simply in socio-political or economic terms, but due to the 'ambiguity' of collective identity that the suburb's emerging far-right movement seeks to redress. Fairfax seeks to validate the anger and despair behind the nationalist violence during his meeting with Pearson, arguing that Brooklands 'had a real community' until it had been 'swamped by outsiders' (32). In the messianic ramblings of David Cruise to his fawning supporters, Pearson further overhears how the communities of such 'outsiders' are to blame for the crisis of collective identity, with Cruise hatefully exclaiming: 'Community? I know what an Asian community is [...] I know what a Muslim community is [...] We all know, don't we? Yes... I hate community' (176). The evocative symbolism that adorns the streets of Brooklands and the paranoiac excess of identification with an 'imagined community', a constructed ideal of a 'real England' that Dr Maxted juxtaposes

⁷⁸ Paddy provides an insightful perspective on *Kingdom Come*'s preoccupation with the St George's Cross in *The Empires of J.G. Ballard*, detailing its re-emergence in the 1990s in order to 'ease that anxiety over England's lack of non-British symbols' (326-327).

with the ‘heritage’ Britain that preceded the twenty-first century, signals that the vacuum of national identity perceived by Fairfax and Cruise is not only the fault of the immigrant Other, but also of a deteriorating sense of tradition and values (KC, 101). Upon his arrival at Brooklands, Pearson reflects that the hollowness and unreality of the suburban outlands – from the transience of its neon signs and floodlit stadiums to its ever-present threat of violence and criminality – is a result of a wider deterioration of British identity, stating that ‘history and tradition, the slow death by suffocation of an older Britain, played no part in its people’s lives’ (8). This absence of history and tradition compounds the void of identity that the depoliticised Brooklands population experience in the novel – typifying the widespread vacuum of a dystopian Britain that, as Ballard’s reflective interview comments suggest, appears to be ‘without a future’.

The crisis of national identity in *Kingdom Come* is most perceptible in the disconnect the Brooklands population feels from the nation as a whole:

People in London can’t grasp that this is the real England. Parliament, the West End, Bloomsbury, Notting Hill, Hampstead – they’re heritage London, held together by a dinner-party culture. Here, around the M25, is where it’s really happening. This is today’s England. Consumerism rules, but people are bored. They’re out on the edge, waiting for something big to come along (101).

The ‘something big’ that Pearson uncovers in *Kingdom Come* – a neo-fascist insurgency united by the symbolism of the St George’s cross – develops in reaction to the ‘ambiguous’ sense of Englishness felt in his radically divided country. In *The Empires of J.G. Ballard*, Paddy claims that while the suburbs generally depict inauthenticity in Ballard’s writing, *Kingdom Come* disrupts this trend by depicting a Brooklands community firm in the belief that they ‘represent a new England that is more authentic than the rest of Britain’ (Paddy, 325). Cross-examining contentious contemporary issues of immigration, disenchantment with the political establishment and national identity or sovereignty, the novel presciently charts the increasing divisions of twenty-first century British society – not only in terms of

the broader union and disunion of Britain's constituent nations and continental partnerships, but further in the intra-national tensions between metropolitan, suburban and rural England. Paddy's argument for *Kingdom Come*'s 'reverse colonization narrative', where an increasingly fractious suburbia plays 'colonial outpost to metropolitan imperial London', insightfully considers the quasi-postcolonial backlash of a 'left behind' community (Paddy, 325). However, despite Paddy's suggested break in depictions of the Ballardian suburb as a site of inauthenticity, the Brooklands community ultimately pursues its dissent and desire for a more comprehensible sense of collective belonging in a vicious identity politics that, ultimately, does little to allay the collective anxiety of 'ambiguous' Englishness. Balibar's broader thesis that 'democratic politics is a difficult, "ambiguous" art of combining the opposed terms of identification and disidentification' thus provides an insightful framework for interpreting the novel's exploration of the relationship between strategic depoliticisation and a contemporary form of democratic deficit (Balibar, x). This connection between Balibar's theoretical conclusions and Ballard's politically attuned speculations is best evidenced in *Kingdom Come*'s narrative representation of how a post-political consensus of 'disidentification' and a widespread disenfranchisement from public and political spheres creates fertile ground for dangerous forms of 'identification' – in this case, with the symbolism and identity politics of a neo-fascistic nationalism (Balibar, x).

In his references to Benedict Anderson's work on symbols and representations in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Balibar invokes Anderson's influential thesis that a nation is 'an imagined political community' (Balibar, 66; Anderson, 6). In the eighth chapter of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson, exploring patriotism and racism, pointedly offers a more nuanced perspective on nationalism in response to the myopia of the 'cosmopolitan' intellectualism of his contemporaries, arguing for how nations inspire devotion and self-sacrificing commitment, as well as

acknowledging the ‘near-pathological character’ of nationalist movements that pre-existing critical work had explored at length (Anderson, 141). Ballard’s focus on this ‘near-pathological’ excess of national identity emerges at the end of a series of contemporary novels that develop his broader concern with psychology, pathologies and ‘contemporary psychopathies’ – the latter of which is extensively explored (with a focus on Freudian social psychology and post-Freudian philosophy) in chapter five of Samuel Francis’ *The Psychological Fictions of J.G. Ballard* (Francis, 155).⁷⁹ Francis’ investigation of the psychological preoccupations of Ballard’s writing comprehensively captures, to adopt Benedict Anderson’s words, the ‘near-pathological character’ of *Kingdom Come*’s vision of crowds and communities drawn to violence and nationalism; however, both a nuanced conception of nationalism (such as that proposed by Anderson’s propositions in *Imagined Communities*) and the specificity of Ballard’s own remarks on the socio-cultural and political context of *Kingdom Come*’s speculations suggest that the novel’s version of nationalism is one that not only possesses a pathological character, but one that works in the malleable space of the individual and collective socio-political imaginary. The identificatory symbols, beliefs and destructive rituals of the St George’s group at Brooklands fuel a collective identity that radicalizes a people made dormant by consumer-capitalism and depoliticisation, shaking the societal malaise with a divisive far-right nationalist vision of its constructed ‘imagined community’. Such an imaginary, which both engages those previously marginalised from society and violently excludes a necessarily-constructed Other, is interpreted by Jean Baudrillard in *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2002/2012). Resonating with *Kingdom Come*’s visions of ethnic cleansing and racist intimidation, Baudrillard suggests that ‘the Other, like Evil, is unimaginable [...] It all comes from the impossibility of conceiving of the Other –

⁷⁹ See Simon Francis, *The Psychological Fictions of J.G. Ballard* (2011), pp. 155-183.

friend or enemy – in its radical otherness, in its irreconcilable foreignness’ (Baudrillard, 49).⁸⁰ Exploiting the void created by an ambiguous national and political identity, the Brooklands revolutionaries posit an imagined community that is strengthened by the ‘unimaginable’ nature of an Other it constructs in order to strengthen its imaginary of a ‘real England’, represented in a highly politicised fashion by the St George’s cross in the novel. Two forms of the Other are constructed by the ‘imagined community’ constructed by the far-right movement of *Kingdom Come*: that of the internal Other – a constructed conception of a metropolitan elite detached from the realities of life outwith the city, representing a ‘heritage’ Britain and its ‘dinner-party culture’; and, secondly, that of the racial Other – the Asian and Muslim communities help up for contempt by David Cruise during his broadcast, and the St George’s group during their violent outings (101; 176). While the terrorism Baudrillard addresses in his above remarks is most applicable to Ballard’s *Millennium People*, with its powerful exploration of terrorism in an uncanny dystopian Britain, it further explains the England that *Kingdom Come* depicts: one where fear, suspicion and the constant threat of violence renders the population on edge, and where Britain is vulnerable to ‘lone wolf’ terror attacks such as Christie’s at the Metro-Centre. Pearson himself reflects that he ‘thinks of himself as a kind of terrorist’ early in the novel, later being branded a ‘suburban Dr Goebbels’ by Maxted for his part in marketing the St George’s revolution to the Brooklands community (9). Ballard’s deft exploration of politicised acts of terror as a dangerous vehicle of the political imaginary and a psycho-social tool for both uniting and depoliticising crowds and communities both resounds with the thematic focus of the late fictions and marks a more markedly dystopian critique of nationalism than anything hitherto evidenced in his oeuvre.

⁸⁰ This quote, originally from Baudrillard’s ‘Hypotheses on Terrorism’ (2002), is referenced from the 2012 collection of essays *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2012 – p.49, as above).

Filling the Vacuum: Spectacular Society and the Lonely Crowd

Competing with the imagined community and collective identity constructed by the St George's brigade in *Kingdom Come* is the anaesthetising, illusory form of belonging offered by the Metro-Centre's consumerist hyper-culture. As David Ian Paddy has argued, the patriotism of the St George's cross-wearing crowds of *Kingdom Come* is a type of patriotism that is 'tied to consumerism rather than the nation' (Paddy, 327). Benedict Anderson's aforementioned thesis that the nation is an 'imagined community' provides an insightful perspective here, as the imagined communities constructed by both nationalist and consumerist ideologies in *Kingdom Come* equally function by uniting crowds and communities through 'patriotic' forms of identification. Both forms of 'patriotic' identification, however, prove to be insidiously designed to create distance and suspicion between the very individuals they appear to unite. Reflecting the way in which a prevailing ultra-nationalist ideology marginalizes communities and creates unrest at Brooklands, the hollow utopian imaginary propagated by the Metro Centre fills a void of belonging and community through omnipresent spectacles, broadcasts, sporting events and consumer experience in *Kingdom Come*'s dystopian Britain. Just as the Metro Centre – and the 'spectacular' society it intensifies – consolidates the isolation of crowds and communities, it further divides the Brooklands population through its highly political construction of an 'imagined community' of consumers who, in ways reminiscent of the crowds of the Gala in Maggie Gee's *The Flood* (2004), are inspired by the utopian promise of the Centre's bright lights and cathedral-like aura of grandeur. In his influential portrayal of a hyper-technological, image-saturated and 'spectacular' late capitalist society in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Guy Debord identifies a form of strategic estrangement in the relationship between the people and consumerism within socio-political spaces like that of Ballard's Brooklands. Debord states that 'all goods proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to

televisions, also serve as weapons' for a system whose ultimate goal is, he argues, to 'reinforce the isolation of the "lonely crowd"' it has divided and alienated from non-representational experience and meaningful forms of collective subjectivity (Debord: 22). While both Jake Huntley, in his chapter 'The Madness of Crowds: Ballard's Experimental Communities' (2012), and Samuel Francis, in the fifth chapter of *The Psychological Fictions of J.G. Ballard* (2011), consider the Ballardian crowd from the theoretical frameworks of twentieth century crowd theory and psychological theory (respectively), critical work to date has seldom drawn connections between the Ballardian crowd and its crucial position in *Kingdom Come's* striking depiction of the relationship between consumerism and (neo-fascist) violence, and, secondly, between Ballard's literary depictions of the crowd and the socio-political discourses of twenty-first century Britain – discourses that Ballard's aforementioned interview reflections suggest to have been of fundamental importance to his vision for the novel.⁸¹ The following section proposes a critical-theoretical interpretation of the Ballardian crowd that traces this ground between consumerism and violence(s) by understanding *Kingdom Come's* crowds as manifestations of the Debordian 'lonely crowd'. The individuals of the Ballardian crowd – spectators within the surreal, spectacular political realm of Brooklands – are, I argue, equally united by the depoliticising 'seperateness' outlined in *The Society of the Spectacle's* concept of the lonely crowd, an intersubjective phenomenon in which '[s]pectators are lined only by a one-way relationship to the very centre that maintains their isolation from one another' (Debord: 22).⁸² *Kingdom Come's* vision of

⁸¹ More specifically, Huntley explores the Ballardian crowd in light of the crowd theory of Elias Canetti, with reference to Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of 'order-words' and 'assemblages' in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1991), whereas Francis interprets the novel through the post-Freudian, post-Jungian psychological theory of Michael Billings' *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* (1978). See Jake Huntley (2012) 'The Madness of Crowds: Ballard's Experimental Communities'. *J.G. Ballard: Visions and Revisions*. Ed. Jeannette Baxter and Rowland Wymer. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. 215-229; and Samuel Francis (2011) *The Psychological Fictions of J.G. Ballard*. London: Continuum.

⁸² In Thesis 29 of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord argues that 'Spectators are lined only by a one-way relationship to the very centre that maintains their isolation from one another [...] The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but unites it only in its separateness' (Debord: 22).

this form of alienation and depoliticisation contributes to the shared socio-political vacuum experienced by the masses – who, in the malleable, depoliticised state that the crowds across Ballard’s postmillennial fictions share, are reduced from the people (*demos*), a collective state in which democratic political participation is possible, to the disempowering tumult of the mob (*ochlos*) and the crowd rioting and violence examined in the latter part of this section.⁸³

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord argues that the spectacle is ‘the very heart of society’s real unreality [...] In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life’ (Debord, 13). The spectacle, he claims, is the product of neoliberal late capitalism’s socio-cultural and advanced technological hegemony over a modern life that has been transformed and dominated by images and appearances. The result, he argues, is that ‘[a]ll that was once was directly lived has become mere representation’ (Debord, 12). These spectacular forms of representation produce a society of the spectacle that is, rather than a mere collection of images and appearances, a ‘social relationship between people that is mediated by images’ (Debord, 12). The spectacle thus creates a socio-political space where individuals are alienated from lived experience and social life, and where illusion and delusion form the basis of a disempowering, representational mode of human experience.⁸⁴ In a similarly vivid critical imagination, *Kingdom Come* illustrates a radical model of social life within a Britain in the ‘end state of consumerism’, bleakly envisioning a depoliticised people for whom ‘the deepest moral decisions concerned the purchase of a refrigerator or washing machine’ (KC: 8). The novel’s Ballardian society of the spectacle is

⁸³ Rancière’s definitions of *demos* – ‘the power of the people’ – and *ochlos* – the ‘turbulent unification of individual turbulences’ – from *On the Shores of Politics* again informs my argument here (Rancière 1992/2007: 31).

⁸⁴ Echoing Nineteen Eighty-Four’s famous dystopian depiction of a society where truth and falsehood have become so malleable that Winston Smith comes to believe that ‘TWO AND TWO MAKE FIVE’, Debord claims that in a society where the spectacle has come to dominate socio-political space and human experience, ‘truth is a moment of falsehood’ (Orwell, 318; Debord 14).

best evidenced on Pearson's first visit to the Metro-Centre, whose very architecture creates the effect of an opera stage 'surrounded by a circle and upper circle packed with *spectators*' (41, italics mine). The vision of the contemporary world of hyper-consumerism advertised by the Metro-Centre's omnipresent television channel is supported by the experience generated within the Centre itself, creating the illusion that its customers 'were extras in a music drama that had become the world' (41). *Kingdom Come* narrates the eventual succumbing of Pearson, a professional advertising executive, to the allure of shaping the 'imagined community' that populates the unreal world of surface and spectatorship that he initially recognises – suggesting that the 'kingdom' referred to in the novel's title is neither the United Kingdom or the kingdom of heaven (as Andrew Tate's aforementioned work has suggested), but rather the opaque, staged world in which the consumerist masses exist within the walls of the Metro-Centre.⁸⁵ Within this space of spectacular 'appearance' illustrated in the novel, the alienated members of a Debordian lonely crowd regain a deceptive and illusory form of appearance, and an ephemeral, compensatory sense of belonging that they – as excluded political subjects or members of one of Britain's left behind communities – have been deprived of within the socio-political space of their nation. This proposed connection between Ballard's quasi-Debordian representation of 'spectacular' appearance within a socio-political space characterised by radical depoliticisation and a dystopian form of nationalist ideology further supports Alexander Beaumont's argument that Ballard's late fictions raise 'important questions about the capacity of excluded communities comprising flexible subjects' to oppose the economic and political regimes that govern them (Beaumont, 96). In this particular instance, we might interpret *Kingdom Come*'s socio-political

⁸⁵ See Andrew Tate (2017) *Apocalyptic Fiction* (21st Century Genre Fiction). London: Bloomsbury Academic. pp.24-25.

interrogation as one that identifies specific ideological and strategic political means through which the capacity of such communities to oppose such regimes is precluded or undermined.

In his interview with Jeannette Baxter, Ballard describes how the utopian allure of consumer-capitalism captured the socio-cultural imagination of post-war Britain, presenting a ‘cornucopia of possibilities’ following years of rationing and sacrifice (Baxter: 125). Ballard claims that the contemporary period has evidenced the deterioration of this utopian possibility in to a more dystopian form consumerism that has ‘shifted seamlessly into entertainment’, shaping a depoliticising intersubjectivity between increasingly infantilised and disempowered individuals (Baxter: 126). In *Kingdom Come*, Ballard powerfully shifts between these utopian and dystopian visions in illustrating the consumer-capitalist ideology of a dystopian Britain where consumerism ‘dominated the lives of its people, who looked as if they were shopping whatever they were doing’ (15). *Kingdom Come*’s lurid vision of a culturally pervasive consumerism that at once shapes societal relations and erodes meaningful public discourse resoundingly echoes a key argument of *The Society of the Spectacle*, in Debord’s claim that such societies evidence the ‘downgrading of *being* into *having*’ – or, in other words, see the reduction of selfhood to ‘spectatorship’, and of meaningful subjective and inter-subjective belonging and action to a facile form of togetherness within ‘lonely’ crowds of consumers (Debord: 16). Brooklands’ consumer culture offers its false utopian promise by tapping into the deep rooted desires of its customers, and offering fragments of that promise through its products and imagery, as Sergeant Falconer affirms to Pearson in his statement that ‘we buy things to make us grow again’ (21). Ballard’s Metro-Centre is a ‘cathedral of consumerism’ comprised of ‘huge temples’ that ascend upward, interrupted only by a sublime dome-glass roof that resembles ‘an observatory open to the heavens’ (KC: 15, 37, 142). Its strolling crowds are bathed ‘in a light more healing than anything on offer from the sun’, and its shops, gardens, hotels and

restaurants are ‘each an Eden promising an experience more meaningful than self-knowledge or eternal life’ (38). The Metro-Centre’s cult-like form of consumerist life has evidently replaced organized forms of religion and constitutes the basis of a society where, to subvert Marx’s influential claim, consumerism, rather than religion, is the ‘opium of the people’ (Marx: 1).⁸⁶ Ballard’s quasi-Marxian vision of consumer-capitalism as an ‘opium of the people’ is to be seen throughout the novel, as descriptions of pseudo-religiosity convey the zeal and desire of consumers seeking solace and feeling through shopping. The Metro-Centre is said to be the ‘St Peter’s Square of the retail world’, and is a ‘place of worship [...] the last refuge of the religious instinct’ (KC: 253, 114). In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord explains that the power of the religious and sacred was rooted in the ‘expounding upon and embellishing what society *could not deliver*’, and that the masses’ allegiance to religious imagery was founded upon a ‘shared acknowledgement of loss’ (Debord: 20). By contrast, the modern spectacle depicts what society *can* deliver, however, as Debord argues, within this depiction ‘what is permitted is rigidly distinguished from what is possible’ (Debord: 20). Just as stewards sporting the St George’s cross maintain control over the tumultuous crowds of Brooklands, steering the chaos to achieve the ends of the leaders of the quasi-fascist revolt, the Metro Centre’s careful execution of its televised propaganda and projected utopic visions vigilantly designates the boundaries of its message, ensuring that the utopianism promised by its marketing is restricted to an empty wishfulness, detached from the realities of the dystopian social and political present in which it operates.

The connections between Debord’s diagnoses of the spectacular society and Pearson’s observations of Brooklands and its Metro-Centre are perhaps most apparent during Pearson’s interaction with the Centre’s zealous public relations manager Tom Carradine. Mirroring the

⁸⁶ Marx famously argues in his introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844/1976) that ‘Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people’ (1).

Debordian conception of the spectacle as that which fills the void of an absent faith in organised religion, Carradine states:

“That’s why our customers come here. The Metro-Centre creates a new climate, Mr Pearson...This isn’t just a shopping mall. It’s more like a...”

“Religious experience?”

“Exactly! It’s like going to church. And here you can go every day and you get something to take home.” (40)

Pearson, a professional in advertising, and Tom Carradine, the Metro-Centre’s PR manager, are among those captivated with the idea of becoming the gods of this new religious experience, and the potent architects of the images and dreams designed to captivate the consumers and crowds of Brooklands. They believe that, much like a divine intervention, their own appearance in the world of appearances they have created would signal a truly miraculous or apocalyptic moment: ‘when they appeared live on television a miracle would follow...the seas would part, and the sky would fall’ (221). Yet it is the messiah they create, David Cruise, who becomes far more akin to a deity to the consumer crowds of middle England. Cruise is ‘completely sincere, the naturalized citizen of a new kingdom where nothing was true, or false’, and belongs to a ‘parallel space and time where celebrity redefined reality as itself’ (204, 206). Cruise’s role as the poster boy of Pearson’s revolutionary marketing campaign in Brooklands magnifies his mystical celebrity, evidenced in his comical Papal gestures to cheering crowds on the balcony of the Metro-Centre’s plaza (122). His image saturates every visual medium in Brooklands, and a Debordian interpretation of this chaotic scene at the plaza would suggest that the omnipresence of Cruise’s image is closely tied to the identity or non-identity of the members of the Brooklands community. Debord’s 64th thesis of *The Society of the Spectacle* describes the effect of the *master*, who is the ‘guarantor’ of the spectacle’s unity: ‘everyone must identify magically with this absolute celebrity – or disappear’ (Debord, 42). *Kingdom Come*’s depiction of a dystopian society of

the spectacle suggests, however, that the identification and ‘appearance’ offered to the consumerist crowds that amble through the Metro-Centre and swarm its plaza during organised spectacles is ultimately designed to deny the non-representational forms of appearance and participation within the socio-political space of the novel’s Britain. The quasi-Debordian ‘disappearance’ of lonely crowds of consumers in *Kingdom Come* – or, in other words, the removal of depoliticised subjects from the space in which they could meaningfully engage in speech and action as political subjects – ultimately, I argue, leads to the violent reclamation of political appearance in fleeting acts of rioting and racist intimidation that has dominated much critical attention to date.⁸⁷

In ‘The Madness of Crowds: Ballard’s Experimental Communities’ (2012), Jake Huntley notes that in *Kingdom Come* the ‘social spaces of Brooklands, and indeed all the M25 towns, are constantly occupied by crowds’ (Huntley, 221). Huntley’s point here is perhaps best captured in chapter thirty of the novel, where Ballard distinctively illustrates how ‘ITN and BBC news teams’ urgently televise footage of ‘strolling crowds’ in order to assuage the masses that normalcy had returned to the Metro-Centre (202). This omnipresence of crowds and crowd psychology is to be seen across Ballard’s twenty-first century fictions, from the crowds that swarm the Metro-Centre or march through Brooklands sporting the St George’s Cross in *Kingdom Come* to the riotous crowds of Chelsea Marina in *Millenium People* and the recreational violence of *ratissage* enthusiasts in *Super-Cannes*. Drawing on

⁸⁷ Key examples of Ballardian scholarship that examines violence and psychopathology in *Kingdom Come* include: Philip Tew’s ‘Situating the Violence of J.G. Ballard’s Postmillennial Fiction: The Possibilities of Sacrifice, the Certainties of Trauma’ (2009); Samuel Francis’ chapter on ‘Contemporary Psychopathies’ in *The Psychological Fictions of J.G. Ballard* (2011); J. Carter Wood’s “‘Going mad is their only way of staying sane’: Norbert Elias and the Civilized Violence of J.G. Ballard’ (2012); Jake Huntley’s ‘The Madness of Crowds: Ballard’s Experimental Communities’ (2012); and Graham Matthews’ ‘Consumerism’s Endgame: Violence and Community in J.G. Ballard’s Late Fiction’ (2013). A similar thematic focus is also evident in early twenty-first century Ballardian criticism that predates the novel’s 2006 publication, with the final chapter of Andrzej Gasiorek’s *J.G. Ballard* (2005) on ‘Violence and psychopathology’ providing an insightful examination of the critical trajectory of Ballard’s late fictions later developed in *Kingdom Come*.

crowd theory and Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of order-words and assemblage, Huntley's theoretically-informed examination considers the ways in which 'occult currents of power' govern the crowd in Ballard's late fictions. Huntley ultimately aligns Ballard's depiction of the crowd with Canetti's significant critical intervention and disruption of the theoretical consensus in *Crowds and Power* (1960), where Canetti undermines the largely unchallenged assumption that a crowd cannot exist without the presence of a crowd leader (Huntley, 217). As Huntley notes, it is John McClelland's finding, in his 1989 work *The Crowd and The Mob: From Plato to Canetti*, that "No leader, no crowd" is the motto of almost all crowd theory up to Canetti' – a trend that, McClelland claims, saw crowd theory effectively become indistinguishable from leadership theory (McClelland, 297; Huntley, 217). The connection of Canetti's notion of 'occult currents of power' to the crowds of *Kingdom Come* is, however, potentially problematic within this context of the crowd theory Huntley cites. While Huntley considers David Cruise as a co-conspirator behind a 'consumer-cult', the novel's suggestion in Maxted's defeated admission to Pearson that 'we did our best to stir up the crowd [...] But without Cruise it was hopeless' is that Cruise is, in fact, an atypical leader without which there is, to cite McClelland's point, 'no crowd' (Huntley: 222; KC: 262; McClelland, 297). Cruise's leadership of the crowd is 'atypical' due to his aforementioned status as a Debordian 'absolute celebrity' within the society of the spectacle that governs socio-cultural space and the political imagination in *Kingdom Come* – yet within this complex leader-crowd relation his role is, as Maxted suggests, indispensable. Pearson reaffirms this importance when guiding Cruise on how to work the crowd, confirming to him that '[y]our role is to empower them' and that '[y]ou steer them by sensing their mood [...] Think of a herd of wildebeest on the African plain' (146). Conjuring these visions of the crowd as *ochlos* – which is, as Rancière claims, the masses characterised by a 'turbulent unification of individual turbulences' – Pearson's remarks on the crowd appear alongside the novel's loosely allusive

examination of a ‘new politics’ of the twenty-first century, both in terms of its dystopian illustration in *Kingdom Come* and its contextual political equivalent, in Ballard’s cynicism concerning New Labour’s ‘new politics’, as described in this chapter’s first section (Rancière 1992/2007: 31). With echoes of Ballard’s criticisms in interview, Pearson – with Cruise as his interlocutor – outlines the key features of a nightmarish political philosophy of a ‘new politics’ in the novel’s eponymous twenty-first chapter, and espouses proclamations such as:

There is no message. Messages belong to the old politics (146).

No slogans, no messages. New politics. No manifestos, No commitments (146).

Just as the saturation of spectacular society with representational experience and images is fundamental to the isolation of the ‘lonely crowd’ in Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*, *Kingdom Come*’s radically dystopian extrapolation of the depoliticising tenets of an ideologically flexible ‘new politics’ explores the vacuum that spectacular society creates; a vacuum that alienates and disempowers the ‘lonely crowd’, who, in the novel, consequently resort to an equally flawed means of filling that vacuum through collective violence.

In his article ‘Consumerism’s Endgame: Violence and Community in J.G. Ballard’s Late Fiction’ (2013), Graham Matthews draws attention to the striking scene in *Kingdom Come* where, in one of a number of instances of racially motivated intimidation and violence, the windows in a street full of properties owned by Asian businessmen and families are purposefully smashed. Supporting Jake Huntley’s point that the novel’s dystopian critique is predominantly fixated on how consumerism sharply pivots to fascism within a depoliticised society, Matthews suggests that the scene ‘invites direct comparison with the SA’s attack on Jewish shops over Kristallnacht’ (136).⁸⁸ Destruction such as that which takes place during the Kristallnacht-style attacks at Brooklands is seen alongside several instances of controlled,

⁸⁸ Huntley describes Ballard’s depiction as one of consumer values ‘exaggerated into a healthy-option fascism’ (Huntley, 215).

targeted violence in *Kingdom Come*, such as that of the ‘very suburban form of race riot’ that takes place early in the novel (11). Violence, in this unsettling illustration of the ‘religious cleansing’ of a local mosque in the presence of a docile crowd of onlookers, is seen to be inextricably tied to the consumerism that holds sway upon the political imagination and socio-cultural outlook of suburban Britain, as Richard Pearson’s reflections suggest: ‘Shopping was now the model for all human behaviour, drained of emotion and anger [...] The decision by the estate-dwellers to reject the imam was an exercise of consumer choice’ (12). Both incidents – the race riot that Pearson witnesses upon his arrival at Brooklands, and the Kristallnacht-esque symbolic destruction of the properties and homes of the immigrant ‘other’ – illuminate the intricacies of Ballard’s depiction of the relationship between consumerism and violence in the novel. On the one hand, Maxted’s assertion that ‘consumerism is the one thing that gives us our sense of values’ is consistently confirmed during Pearson’s time in the suburb, and in key scenes such as that of the race riot (102; 11). Consumerism, along the lines described by Maxted, has sutured the divide between the now-absent senses of civic responsibility and cultural identity, replacing political subjectivity with a morally vacuous form of thought that bears resemblance to consumer choice. It is, however, the inadequacy of this suturing and the existential boredom that leads to another form of violence that, while remaining a psychopathological by-product of consumerism’s stultifying socio-cultural hegemony at Brooklands, also represents the lonely crowd’s more symbolic attempts to lash out at the conditions that oppress and infantilize the citizens of Ballard’s society of the spectacle. Spectacular society has, however, depoliticised and swayed the lonely crowd, with the consequence that their ‘lashing out’ is misdirected and repurposed in order that another societal group – the foreign, immigrant ‘Other’ whose presence as the source of blame for the crowd’s grievances masks the systemic injustices that have alienated them – are marginalised and subject to the mob’s chaotic violence.

In light of attacks such as the ‘Kristallnacht’ of Brooklands, the Ballardian crowd’s seemingly senseless destructiveness is arguably best understood through the crowd theory of Elias Canetti, from his influential text *Crowds and Power*. In particular, Canetti’s description of the symbolic effect of vandalism supports the notion that the Ballardian crowd’s ritual-like violent destruction of shop windows, houses and mosques holds symbolic meaning for the depoliticised, disenfranchised rioters – providing a new outlet through which to unleash the rage that the subliminal propaganda of Cruise’s Metro-Centre broadcasts and the quasi-fascistic nationalism of the St George’s group have mutually cultivated. In articulating his analogy of a house whose windows and doors have been smashed in, Canetti suggests that when these symbolic perimeters have been breached or broken by the baying mob the house loses its ‘individuality’, and that the distances and boundaries separating those in power and the marginalised have ‘now been destroyed and nothing stands between them and the crowd’ (19). In *Kingdom Come*, Canetti’s analogy is perhaps most clearly evidenced at the outset of the novel, when Pearson enters an empty Indian restaurant and – in the first of many sights of broken windows in the suburb – learns from its nervous Bengali manager that ‘[s]omeone had thrown a brick at the plate-glass window’ (7). Ballard draws further attention to this image of the window through his depiction of Pearson resolutely sitting in front of the ‘fractured glass’, through which he is ‘curious to observe the town’ in which such properties are routinely targeted by volatile crowds (7). In *Crowds and Power*, this theory of Canetti’s ultimately posits that properties with smashed windows – or, to invoke the politically-relevant examples of the shattered windows of retail stores, businesses and homes during the 2011 riots in England and the 2012 riots in Northern Ireland that *Kingdom Come* presciently imagines – thus become representational images for barriers and distances rejected and transgressed within the societal imaginary of the disenfranchised individuals of a ‘lonely crowd’. Within the context of twenty-first century Britain, Canetti’s claim resonates across

notable interview remarks from rioters in the aftermath of key moments from the 2011 UK riots, collected in *The Guardian*'s 'Reading the Riots' online archive, such as the following:

It felt like we've come off the leash (Prasad; 6 December 2011);

This is some next-level revolution coming (Carter; 5 December 2011);

The law was obeying us (Clifton; 9 December 2011).⁸⁹

These remarks, which might easily be mistaken as quotations from the revolting crowds of *Millennium People*, the rioters of *Kingdom Come*, or the violent 'ratissage' enthusiasts of *Super-Cannes*, convey the interlinked ways in which the rioters conceive of their acts as representative of a rupture in the prevailing order of things in contemporary Britain – whether in terms of its formal legal and political establishments or in terms of the Rancièrian 'police order' that governs socio-political relations and societal hierarchies.

In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2008/2009) Slavoj Žižek argues, via Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, that the perceived or imagined symbolic meaning of the crowd's speech and actions should be of fundamental importance in critical analysis that seeks – in ways similar to the endeavour of *The Guardian*'s 'Reading the Riots' project – to better understand the apparent senselessness of the kind of crowd destruction Ballard depicts in *Kingdom Come*. In his critical analysis of violence within a globalised twenty-first century context, Žižek claims that 'when we are dealing with the scene of a furious crowd, attacking and burning buildings and cars, lynching people, etc., we should never forget the placards they are carrying and the words which sustain and justify their acts' (Žižek 2008/2009: 57). Ballard's literary analysis of the crowd, and his illustrations of the complexities that lie beneath irrational, explosive images of what Žižek terms visual, 'subjective' violence, each suggest that *Kingdom Come* presents a nuanced and politically prescient depiction of the

⁸⁹ See *The Guardian*'s data-driven study into the causes and consequences of the August 2011 riots at the following link: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/series/reading-the-riots> (Accessed 27/04/2017 at 18:43).

crowd.⁹⁰ While *Kingdom Come*'s descriptions of crowds as *ochlos* or the mob – particularly those found in chapter seventeen, entitled 'The Geometry of the Crowd' – provide a legitimate grounds for interpreting the Ballardian crowd as a twenty-first century reworking of the classical dystopian crowds evidenced in works such as Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes*, Zamyatin's *We*, Lang's *Metropolis*, Huxley's *Brave New World* or Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, there is also much to suggest that *Kingdom Come*'s illustrations of the crowd are more keenly focused on challenging the socio-political conditions of twenty-first century Britain, and the (neoliberal, late capitalist economic and political) conditions that contribute to the alienation and exclusion of the individuals and groups that ultimately constitute the 'lonely crowd'. In Pearson's descriptions of the 'geometry of the crowd', Ballard reflects both the early twentieth century dystopian fears of ochlocracy or mob rule, and – contravening Huntley's hitherto explored connection of the Ballardian crowd to Canetti's turn in crowd theory – articulates the traditional crowd-leader dynamic that dominates crowd theory prior to Canetti's work. Pearson describes the crowd as *ochlos* in the chapter, noting how:

None of them looked at me, or seemed aware that I was leading them. They followed me like commuters in a crowded railway terminal, trailing anyone who had found a gap through the press of travellers. The unique internal geometry of the crowd had come into play, picking the first one leader and then another (120).

Yet alongside such archetypal depictions of the crowd, *Kingdom Come* presents a number of examples where the crowd's violent actions represent a significant symbolic rejection of socio-political boundaries and the invisible 'objective', systemic violence that is routinely exercised on them by the hierarchical, exclusionary logic that governs their socio-political space – as the final section of this chapter examines in greater depth. This violent rejection is echoed in the actions of Metro-Centre customers who join the St George's movement in the

⁹⁰ Žižek defines 'subjective violence' as bloody, visible, physical violence – in contrast to the bloodless, invisible and non-physical 'objective violence' that systemic power often exercises upon society (Žižek 2008/2009: 1).

establishment of a 'Republic of the Metro Centre' in chapter thirty-two of *Kingdom Come*; their assistance with the building of barricades during the revolt is felt to be a symbolic reassertion of political agency and resistance, as Pearson observes: 'They resented the police ambush, and the involvement of the army [...] The helicopters endlessly soaring over the roof were trying to intimidate them, and they had decided to stand their ground' (214). In this thirty-second chapter of the novel, Ballard's critical dystopian imaginary depicts a haphazard revolution, where the transgressive, dissensual sentiment at the root of the crowd's insurgency results in a bungled coup of the Metro-Centre. Following the coup, Pearson notes how '[t]he crowd was drifting back into the mall, resigned to a future of eternal shopping', intimating that the lonely crowd's thorough depoliticisation at the hands of spectacular society and the illusory nature of their nationalist or consumerist 'imagined communities' had precluded the potential for their participation in any meaningful challenge to the systemic violence of their dystopian socio-political space (218).

The crowds who have been depoliticised and infantilised by spectacular society in *Kingdom Come* are said to 'dream of violence', and the novel ominously begins with the warning that such masses 'wait patiently for the nightmares that will wake them into a more passionate world' (3). The lonely crowd's desire for reality, identity and meaning is manipulated throughout the novel, as the architects of the Brooklands riots organize spectacles of violence that provide a temporary release for the crowd – a release that, akin to that experienced within the facile utopian promise of consumerism at the Metro-Centre, is fundamentally inauthentic, leaving the roots of the crowd's unrest intact. Conveying Žižek's claim that 'authenticity resides in the act of violent transgression', acts of subjective violence lend the impression of transcendence, transgression or rebellion in *Kingdom Come* and, furthermore, across the equally inauthentic and repressive societies of Ballard's twenty-first century fictions (Žižek 2002: 6). However, the satisfaction of the crowd's desire for non-

representational social and political experience through spectacles of violence is paradoxical, as Žižek's analysis suggests. He argues that the fundamental paradox of the 'passion for the Real' is that it often 'culminates in its apparent opposite, in a theatrical spectacle – from the Stalinist show trial to spectacular terrorist acts [...] the passion for the Real ends up in the pure semblance of the spectacular effect of the Real'. (Žižek 2002: 10-11).⁹¹ Demonstrating symptomatic behaviours of a Debordian lonely crowd, the crowds of *Kingdom Come* are said to exhibit a 'hunger[...] for reality, a rare event in their lives' at such spectacles of violence (123). Their society of the spectacle has denied them the means of engaging with authentic, non-representational experience and political life – contributing to the contemporary vacuum experienced by the citizens of Ballard's contemporary dystopias, and resulting in a disempowering condition where '[t]hey needed action, without any idea what form this might take' (123). The novel's staging of this revolution reveals that the spectacle, and the empty utopian imagined community constructed by the Metro-Centre's 'patriotic' form of consumerism, has failed to fill the vacuum it has itself created.⁹² The cycle, however, is prophesied to continue by Pearson who, at the novel's close, observes the 'spectators' and consumer crowds around him and envisions their future presence as 'marchers' mechanically moving to the beat sung by the next crowd leader to surface in the 'fiercer republic' their dystopian Britain would become, unless the 'sane woke and rallied themselves' to disrupt the depoliticising consensus of their socio-political present (280).

⁹¹ In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), Žižek defines the 'Real' as 'the Thing Antigone [eponymous protagonist of Sophocles' *Antigone*] confronts when she violates the order of the City' (Žižek 2002: 6). The manifestation of the 'Real' described by Žižek – understood as the truth or reality at the heart of the insidious, invisible mechanisms of power that govern Antigone's political space – denotes the manifestation of the Rancièrian 'police order' that safeguards the hierarchies, exclusions and consensus that regulate socio-political space.

⁹² This point is consolidated by Pearson's observation that the crowd 'needed violence, and realized that David Cruise was too unreal, too much an electronic illusion' (123).

Disunities of Consensus: Ochlocracy and the Police Order

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), George Orwell influentially explored the ways in which populations could be strategically depoliticised and rendered incapable of conceiving of socio-political change. Winston Smith's observations powerfully elucidate Ingsoc's insidious governance strategy, and their means of precluding resistance:

Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbours, films, football, beer, and above all, gambling filled up the horizon of their minds. To keep them in control was not difficult [...] All that was required of them was a primitive patriotism which could be appealed to whenever it was necessary to make them accept longer working hours or shorter rations. And when they become discontented, as they sometimes did, their discontentment led nowhere, because being without general ideas, they could only focus it on petty specific grievances (Orwell, 82-83).

Reviving this Orwellian notion – perhaps best evidenced in the enforced daily ‘hate sessions’ of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – that the combination of insidious depoliticisation strategies and a ‘primitive patriotism’ aids the suppression of dissent, *Kingdom Come* envisions an equally consensual public sphere where the infantilising influence of consumer culture and the mobilisation of a violent identity politics ensures that, in Rancièrian terms, the *demos* (‘the power of the people’) is always reduced to *ochlos* (‘the turbulent unification of individual turbulences’) (Rancière 1992/2007: 31). Echoing the Orwellian literary imagination, *Kingdom Come*'s dystopian vision reimagines the dynamic where crowds and collectives become incapable of recognising or resisting the conditions that fundamentally oppress them, and are disenfranchised from, or disillusioned with, the democratic participation necessary to effect the socio-political change they desire. Balibar, as noted earlier in the chapter, argues that democratic politics is the ‘difficult’ art of combining opposing terms of identification and disidentification, a critical position that connects with Chantal Mouffe's criticism of New Labour's political philosophy – a philosophy that Mouffe identifies as complicit in both an ‘increasing acceptance of inequalities’ in British society and a consensual mode of governance seeking to eliminate the ‘difficult’ or antagonistic elements of democratic politics

(Mouffe 2000: 122-123).⁹³ Peter Burnham's aforementioned critique of New Labour's strategies of depoliticisation equally suggests that Blair's radical 'modernisation' of British politics, a 'New Politics for the New Century', relied on neutralising key 'agonistic' elements of democratic participation – a process described by Mouffe in *The Return of the Political* (1993) and, with explicit reference to New Labour, in *The Democratic Paradox* (2000). Mouffe suggests that the pursuit of consensual modes of governance in the late twentieth century seeks the impossible unanimity of a 'world without antagonism', and argues that accepting 'the political' – a process and activity of an inherently antagonistic nature – provides a better starting point for achieving a pluralistic democratic order (Mouffe 1993/1997:4). It is from a critique of political philosophies such as the 'Third Way' of New Labour that Mouffe proposes her theory of *agonistic pluralism*, defined as 'the constitution of collective identities around clearly differentiated positions and the possibility of choosing between real alternatives' (Mouffe 1993/1997: 4).⁹⁴ Mouffe argues against the thesis that consensus is the ultimate end of democratic politics, and proceeds to claim that 'when there is a lack of democratic political struggles with which to identify, their place is taken by other forms of identification, of ethnic, nationalist or religious nature, and the opponent is defined in those terms too' Mouffe (1993/1997: 6).⁹⁵ Ballard's vision in *Kingdom Come* presents a radical dystopian extrapolation of these theoretical trajectories of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In the novel, his literary vision considers not only the effects of depoliticisation strategies with a near-Orwellian political pessimism, but further probes Mouffe's proposition that the deterioration of democratic politics and the public sphere can

⁹³ Mouffe sets out this critique in Chapter 5 of *The Democratic Paradox* (2000).

⁹⁴ Blair and New Labour's propounding of the 'Third Way' owed much to sociologist Anthony Giddens, particularly his work *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (1998).

⁹⁵ Mouffe associates this notion that consensus is the ultimate end of democratic politics with the political philosophy of John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas – most notably in *The Democratic Paradox* (2000).

consequently result in a strengthening of oppositional forms of collective identification – namely, with those of nationalism and ethnicity.

Rancière's theoretical definitions, or re-definitions, of politics and 'police' provide an insightful theoretical framework through which *Kingdom Come*'s exploration of the subtle modes of coercion at the heart of depoliticising, consensual public and political spheres can be meaningfully interpreted. The novel's illustration of the threatening or violent methods of maintaining the status quo at Brooklands presents a radical illustration of Rancière's conception of politics as 'police' (*la police*) in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1999). In *Disagreement*, Rancière defines police as 'the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution' (*Disagreement*: 28).⁹⁶ More simply, *la police* is an order of bodies that 'defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying' within a given space of socio-political appearance (*Disagreement*: 29). As stated in Rancière's 'Ten Theses on Politics', consensus is the reduction of politics (*la politique*) to the police order, and, consequently, 'the end of politics' itself (*Dissensus*: 43). As Samuel Chambers has noted, the term *la police* is fundamental to the Rancièrian critique of 'neoliberal consensus politics', in that Rancière denies such a politics the term *la politique* precisely due to its post-political character (Chambers, 20). Instead, as Oliver Davis notes, the Rancièrian conception of *la politique* takes place when 'people who appear to be unequal are declared equal and the regulatory work of the police order is shown to be arbitrary' (Davis, 79). *Kingdom Come*, I argue, vividly illustrates how the police order regulates and maintains a Brooklands population amidst the endgame of neoliberal consensus politics. The depoliticisation of public and political spheres

⁹⁶ Further critical analysis of this definition of the police in Rancière's *Disagreement* can be found in Paul Patton (2012) 'Rancière's Utopian Politics'. *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality*. Jean-Phillipe Deranty and Alison Ross (eds.). London: Continuum. p.130.

and the thorough levelling of ‘agonistic’ politics or democratic struggle – in order to consolidate the prevailing stultified consensus – has paved the way for the Metro-Centre’s socio-cultural hegemony and David Cruise’s moral and political philosophy of consumer choice. Promulgating his radical views on his Metro-Centre cable television programme, Cruise affirms that ‘community means living in a little box, driving a little car, going on little holidays [...] It means obeying the rules that “they” tell you to obey’ (176). In *Kingdom Come*, the rejection of the ‘rules’ of the prevailing police order directly results in an abandonment of declining British traditions and values and a violent lashing out at the remaining forms of community left at Brooklands, identified by Cruise as the Asian and Muslim communities resident in the suburb (176). The rejection of the police order of ‘community’ in the novel – the permissible ways of being, doing and saying – suggests that we might hypothesise that a Rancierian form of dissensus is evident in the collective dissent of *Kingdom Come*, as a population in Brooklands rejects the socio-political fabric of a ‘heritage’ Britain that has disenfranchised them (*KC*: 101). However, those participating in the revolts and riots remain subject to a new police order constructed by both the Metro Centre and the hierarchy of the far-right St George’s movement – competitors in the so-called ‘herd game’ of a politics that operates by reducing the people (*demos*) to a destructive – but politically impotent – *ochlos*.

Ballard frequently draws our attention to the police, and policing, in *Kingdom Come*, depicting the coercive means of control employed by figures such as Cruise or Fairfax, Maxted and Sangster to manipulate the depoliticised population of Brooklands. Their sinister activities and inciting of violence is enabled by the diminishing presence of the traditional police force in the novel’s vision of Britain, as Maxted outlines to Pearson: ‘The police? They’d be touched by your faith in them [...] They haven’t realised how much everything has changed out here [...] They’re not alone in that’ (101). The novel’s early plot twist reveals

that the slim remains of the police force at Brooklands have also been corrupted by those competing for political power in the suburb, as Duncan Christie, the purported killer of Pearson's father, is released from custody following the police's disconcerting withdrawal of their charges (47). Still recoiling from the shock of the apparent miscarriage of justice, Pearson observes the constables that 'reluctantly' sheath their truncheons and exclaims that 'the police sell violence [...] The idea of violence' – a jarring, but fitting, allegation of a suburb where the quotidian threat of violence divides and isolates the population (48). Concurrent with the absence of an adequate police force to maintain order and prevent the rioting and destruction of the St George's Cross-wearing crowds, the burly ringleaders of the far-right group itself function as an informally-sanctioned policing presence themselves.⁹⁷ Sargeant Falconer describes these 'team leaders' to Pearson, stating that 'they help us to control the crowds [...] Or that's what Superintendent Leighton likes to think' (24). A frequently looming presence at the sites of supporters' demonstrations, violent 'cleansing' of their community and organised rioting at night, the 'local storm troopers' function as a policing presence on such occasions, as seen in the 'race riots' or spectacle at the police station during Christie's release early in the novel (11, 62). Furthermore, their presence is of greater significance in Brooklands and the novel; they are safeguards of the police order (*la police*), consistently enforcing the boundaries of the permissible, in a physical sense, and integral to the maintenance of the depoliticised consensus of the groups they either incite to violence or control at will.

Oliver Davis argues that underlying the regulatory framework of the Rancièrian police order is the assumption that society is a 'whole of which all the parts are already known – already named and counted' (Davis, 79). *Kingdom Come*'s prescient exploration of rioting

⁹⁷ This absence is not simply implicit in *Kingdom Come*: for instance, as the threat of violence builds outside the Metro-Centre, Pearson notes that 'Nowhere was there a single policeman' (88).

and civil disorder as a violent rebuke of an alienating, depoliticising status quo suggests that those marginalised by such ‘naming’ and ‘counting’ partake in violence and a violent identity politics as a means of resisting the exclusionary regulatory framework of their given police order. To adopt Simon Critchley’s instructive terminology, we might understand the Ballardian crowd as a perverse expression of an *uncounted demos* – a people who have ‘no right to govern’, or, in Rancierian terms, a people who are deprived of political appearance within the ‘distribution of the sensible’ created and maintained by their hegemonic police order (Critchley: 129).⁹⁸ Here we arguably evidence the limitations of a Rancièrian reading of *Kingdom Come*’s dystopian vision, as, in Rancierian terms, a fleeting dissensual intervention in the police order is evident in a Brooklands insurgency where an *uncounted demos* re-enters the ‘field of perception’, violently rejecting the exclusions and hierarchies that have denied them the means of political appearance. However, the fleeting, psychopathological nature of their actions and participation, the reinstating of a police order that continues to marginalise – the immigrant Other, in this instance – and the perpetuation of an unthinking consensus inevitably mean that the Rancierian ‘political’ (*la politique*) and genuine dissensus is fundamentally absent in the novel. As Davis argues, Rancierian ‘politics’ (*la politique*) exposes the arbitrariness of the police order, or, more specifically, the absence of an *arkhe* – a ‘foundational ordering principle’ – at the heart of its hierarchical regulatory framework (Davis: 79). Amidst a status quo that precludes genuine political action in *Kingdom Come*’s vision of Britain, the apparent *arkhe* of the police order’s regulatory framework is, to adopt Debord’s description of the spectator, to ensure that subjects are united ‘only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another’ (Debord: 22). The unison and group feeling of the crowds and nationalist groups at

⁹⁸ Thus, as Rancièrè’s argument for politics and aesthetics as forms of dissensus suggests, a ‘redistribution of the sensible’ inevitably occurs when ‘politics’ intervenes in a given police order (*Dissensus*: 1)

Brooklands is both fleeting and illusory, and ensures that the individual's sole outlet from a depoliticising consumer culture and an alienating socio-political sphere is equally as disempowering. As section two of this chapter has suggested, *Kingdom Come*'s spectacles of crowd violence often evidence expressions of a desire to transcend the unrealities of the socio-political conditions that have infantilised and depoliticised the individuals of those crowds. Along these lines, we might interpret the novel's images of the ochlocratic and destructive rule of the crowd as violent expressions of a desire for the disruption of the 'objective', systemic violence of a police order that oppresses and renders individuals unequal. On this point, Ballard's penultimate and final novels connect in their critical dystopian focus, as Jake Huntley's analysis of *Millennium People*'s use of 'explosive power to challenge systemic power' suggests (Huntley: 221).

Kingdom Come's critical dystopian interrogation of the depoliticising socio-cultural and political frameworks that reduce *la politique* to consensus within the political space of contemporary Britain is particularly notable for its illustration of how a dissensual intervention to the hegemonic consensus of one police order – that of the alienating and unequal 'heritage Britain' criticised by Maxted – is nonetheless followed by the establishment of a subsequent form of *la police* (KC, 101).⁹⁹ In this latter form, the novel's most ferocious and politically-focused critical visions can be evidenced, as Pearson repeatedly encounters the exclusionary police order that violently marginalises the non-white immigrant communities of Brooklands. Each of these two forms of *la police* are linked by an anxiety surrounding community and identity – an anxiety that finds its root in the repressive

⁹⁹ The 'heritage Britain' Maxted vilifies here most straightforwardly alludes to the exclusionary logics of a traditionally 'British' sense of national identity, in addition to the prevailing consensus of a political establishment that has left behind non-metropolitan areas and the lower societal classes. In Ballard's depiction of the targeting of minorities and non-nationals in the violent backlash against the police order that governs the political space of *Kingdom Come*'s dystopian Britain, however, there is much grounds (in the analysis that immediately follows) to suggest that this 'heritage Britain' the populist revolt seeks to destroy may also represent the multiculturalism, globalisation and liberal democratic values that form a major part of the socio-political consensus of Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

regulatory logic that maintains and controls the communities of Ballard's dystopian Britain. Cruise's aforementioned proclamation to his spectators that community means 'living in a little box' and 'obeying the rules that "they" tell you to obey' effectively reflects the emerging socio-political consensus of the *uncounted demos* who, belying a 'heritage' Britain, participate in the spectacles of crowd violence at Brooklands (KC: 176). Similarly restrictive illustrations of community surface across Ballard's postmillennial fictions, where both crowd protesting and mob-like violence are directed against 'the rules', and the objective, systemic violence that societal structures are seen to inflict upon depoliticised citizens. Cruise's association of the 'boxes' constructed by community and the decline of the socio-political imagination within a dystopian Britain connects Ballard's critical vision to a key argument of Margaret Atwood's, from her study of speculative and science fictions in *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (2011). Atwood argues, in her exploration of Kazuo Ishiguro's dystopian novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005), that when the 'expectations of a group are diminished, so is its ability to think outside the box it has been so shut up in' (Atwood: 168). Cruise's remarks and Atwood's foreboding point equally reflect a discernible thematic focus developed across Ballard's late dystopian fictions, each resembling 'kingdoms of the double yellow line' (Ballard, *MP*: 229).¹⁰⁰ The late fictions each explore the often veiled forms of consensus and regulatory logic that exist within communities – whether the 'imagined communities' theorised by Benedict Anderson, or the lived communities of contemporary Britain – and the dystopian potential that such forms of consensus might hold (Ballard, *MP*: 229). The crowd's violent lashing out at contemporary forms of community

¹⁰⁰ Cruise's remarks in *Kingdom Come* are closely paralleled in *Millennium People*'s descriptions of community within its near-future Britain: 'Live here and you're surprisingly constrained. This isn't the good life, full of possibility. You soon come up against the barriers set out by the system...Try letting your lawn grow and not painting your house for a few years...Try living with a teenage girl or having sex with your stepson...Try bad taste' (*MP*: 86). In *Millennium People*, Ballard also illustrates a socio-political space in which a police order maintains consensus and a regulatory framework of speech and action, as Markham learns in the following extract: '[r]emember, David, the middle class have to be kept under control. They understand that, and police themselves. Not with guns and gulags, but with social codes...There are unspoken rules we all have to learn.' (*MP*: 89)

can, as work from critics such as Samuel Francis (2011) and Andrzej Gasiorek (2005) has insightfully demonstrated, be understood in terms of psychological theory and the contemporary psychopathies that erupt in response to the quasi-Freudian ‘garrisons’ constructed within Ballard’s speculative visions of contemporary civilisation.¹⁰¹ However, as Beaumont’s recent development of Roger Luckhurst’s argument that ‘Ballard’s novels challenge hierarchical orders of cultural legitimacy’ suggests, Ballard’s literary visions of violent transgressions and complex psychological behaviours are often constituent features of a wider critique of the socio-political and cultural environments within which the novels were written (Beaumont 2015a: 93).¹⁰² Within these socio-political and cultural contexts, and particularly in light of the content of Ballard’s political commentaries in interview, the Ballardian lonely crowd’s revolt against its oppressive community and the exclusionary logics that govern its socio-political space represents, I argue, more than a fleeting fulfilment of the societal vacuums created by consumerism and a crisis of national identity. In *Kingdom Come*, participation in crowds comes to represent a levelling of the police orders that govern socio-political and ‘imagined’ communities, and a violent rejection of society’s prevailing hierarchies and exclusions. The Ballardian crowd here aligns with the pivotal crowd theory of Canetti in *Crowds and Power*, and Canetti’s point that within crowds individuals traverse the unfreedoms of the rigid horizons around them:

In the crowd the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person [...] he has a sense of relief, for the distances are removed which used to throw him back on himself and shut him in [...] with the lifting of these burdens of distance he feels free (Canetti: 19).

In his analysis of *Crowds and Power* in *The Crowd and The Mob*, McClelland explains that for Canetti, a crowd ‘does not become a crowd until its members lose their burdens of

¹⁰¹ In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud famously claims that ‘[c]ivilization overcomes the dangerous aggressivity of the individual, by weakening him, disarming him and setting up an internal authority to watch over him, like a garrison in a conquered town’ (Freud 1930/2004: 77).

¹⁰² Beaumont develops his point with reference to Roger Luckhurst (1991) ‘Border Policing: Postmodernism and Science Fiction’. *Science Fiction Studies*. 18(3). 358-366.

distance’ – and, similarly, Jake Huntley points to Canetti’s description of the ‘discharge’ of the crowd as the process by which the individuals of the crowd come to feel equal (McClelland: 297; Huntley: 217). This connection between crowd theory and Ballard’s literary depiction of the lonely crowds of *Kingdom Come* suggest that critical interpretations of the Ballardian crowd are best situated within Ballard’s broader illustrations of unequal, depoliticised and disempowered socio-political contexts. Within these contexts, the Ballardian crowd’s practice of what we might understand as *facile* dissensual action can thus be understood as a form of action that represents a transgressive disruption of a police order that creates marginalising hierarchies and exclusions, while simultaneously – as *Kingdom Come* demonstrates – lacking the character of truly ‘political’ action through which individuals can effect socio-political change to the space in which they, as the ‘uncounted demos’, are rendered unequal.

In a 2001 interview with Wakefield, Ballard expresses anxieties later found in *Kingdom Come*’s critical dystopian extrapolations concerning the emerging threats that far-right populism, anti-immigrant rhetoric and racially-motivated violence could present to Britain in the twenty-first century:

If there was a recession, [...] the political climate of this country could turn very ugly very quickly. All the materials are there — a large immigrant population, a lack of civic institutions, and a lack of deference and respect for civil servants, the Church and the monarchy.

We have increasing flashes of racism, homophobia and irrational antipathy towards Europe. As we search for a new identity, our dark side emerges, creeping out of its sewer. One can see, looking down the street at the future, manhole covers being raised and all sorts of dark fears sticking their heads up briefly, trying to catch which way the stench is blowing (Wakefield, 23).

In *Kingdom Come*, Pearson remarks that the Metro-Centre’s omnipresent television broadcasts were ‘preparing us for a new world’ – a brave new world that, reflecting the apprehensions Ballard intimates in his interview with Wakefield, is marked by an ugly and ferocious intolerance (25). The Metro-Centre’s television channel, a fundamental catalyst in

the society of the spectacle that has consumed the suburb, frequently features subliminal material that stimulates both the empty utopian wishfulness of the Metro-Centre's imagined community of consumers and the anti-immigrant rhetoric and anxieties that fuel the emerging far-right populist movement in the suburb. Early in the novel, Pearson learns of the channel's frequent broadcasts on 'key local concerns like asylum seekers', not long following his witnessing of the racist intimidation of an Asian couple at the entrance to the Metro-Centre itself by 'volunteers' in St George's shirts (45; 37). While the dystopian form of populist revolt imagined in the novel is most vividly seen in the spectacles of violence examined in section two of this chapter, its smoothest functioning is arguably to be seen in the non-violent policing and intimidation of minorities and instances where 'no stone [is] thrown' (KC: 11). Falconer ominously alludes to this form of the police order's manifestation within the community upon Pearson's arrival, stating 'Mr Pearson, people don't riot [...] They're far more polite, and far more dangerous...' (26). Alongside the constant presence of nationalist rallies, St George's flags, and the haunting spectre of the Nazi Horst Wessel song in the Metro-Centre's background music, the novel's fears of fascism in Britain are to be seen in 'cleansing' that the neo-fascist movement carries out in the community (39). Pearson describes the callous rationality of the racist project as one influenced by the consumer-choice style of morality that governs their socio-political space:

[A]n exercise in ethnic cleansing was taking place, with the apparent connivance of the local police [...] Using the supporters' clubs in their patriotic livery, they were moving against the immigrant population, harassing them out of their run-down streets to make room for new retail parks, marinas and executive estates (78).

This blend of consumer-choice morality and neo-fascistic ideology results in a dystopian far-right populist consensus at Brooklands – a consensus in which the 'lonely crowd' is key, in maintaining the regulatory framework of the police order at Brooklands, and in violently safeguarding the status quo that exists between the 'imagined community' and the excluded

foreigner. In his essay ‘The Populism That Is Not to Be Found’ (2013/2016), Rancière deconstructs reductive critical assumptions and political conceptions of populism, arguing that ‘the people’ conceived by such conceptions of populism ‘does not exist [;] What exist are diverse or even antagonistic figures of the people’ (Rancière: 2013/2016, 102). Populism, for Rancière, is instead a ‘certain attitude of rejection in relationship to prevailing governmental practices’, and has three essential traits: it is (i) ‘a style of speaking that addresses itself directly to the people’; (ii) the ‘assertion that governments and ruling elites are more concerned with their own interests than the state’; and (iii) an ‘identitary rhetoric that expresses fear and rejection of foreigners’ (Rancière: 2013/2016, 101). In *Kingdom Come*’s rebukes of the political establishment of an unequal ‘heritage Britain’ and the perilous socio-political ‘vacuum’ described by Ballard in his interview with Baxter – in addition to the novel’s prescient speculations on the ways in which inequalities and identity politics could fuel far-right populist opposition to values of diversity and inclusion in twenty-first century Britain – we can identify a critical dystopian exploration of the second and third traits that Rancière outlines in his essay.¹⁰³ Connecting with those second and third traits, Rancière proceeds to argue that the crowds (qua *ochlos*) associated with populist revolts are

a pack possessed by a primary drive of rejection that is aimed simultaneously at the rulers whom it declares traitors [...] and at the foreigners whom it fears through an atavistic attachment to a way of life threatened by demographic, economic and social change (Rancière: 2013/2016, 103).

In the form that Rancière explores in ‘The Populism That Is Not to Be Found’, Ballard’s literary vision of a far-right populist revolt equally constructs both internal and external threats within its ideology and collective imaginary. *Kingdom Come*’s depictions of the

¹⁰³ My argument that Ballard’s speculations on the rise of far-right political views in twenty-first century Britain are prescient is supported here by Winlow, Hall and Treadwell’s study *The rise of the Right: English nationalism and the transformation of working-class politics* (2016), which charts critical attention to the emerging unrest that has grown within marginalised societal groups in twenty-first century Britain, in addition to examining far-right political groups like the English Defence League and the rise of right-wing nationalist rhetoric within de-industrialised and ‘left behind’ areas of England. Another critical influence on my remark here is to be found in chapter four of Imogen Tyler’s *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (2013), which examines the ‘asylum invasion complex’ within the socio-political discourses of contemporary Britain.

crowd's facile dissensual moments are suggestive of a disruption of the police order maintained by the *internal* threat of an exclusionary socio-political status quo; the result, however, is not that of genuine dissensus and a more egalitarian redistribution of the sensible within the socio-political space of the novel's Britain, but rather the subsequent exclusion and oppression of the *external* threat of the migrant outsider.

The consensus at the heart of the far-right populism depicted in the novel is ultimately shown to be another mere mode of precluding disruptive dissensual speech and action within a socio-political space that is reliant on the passivity and disempowerment of its citizens – however, as Ballard's critical dystopian visions of depoliticised political space and socio-political disenfranchisement consistently demonstrate, such forms of consensus frequently produce divisive, violent outcomes. Rachele Dini's analysis in “‘The Problem of This Trash Society’: Anthropogenic Waste and the Neoliberal City in *Super-Cannes*, *Millennium People* and *Kingdom Come*’ (2018) reads the exclusions and oppressions experienced by migrants in Ballard's late dystopias as symptomatic of neoliberal society's delineation of the human ‘waste’ that is surplus to its flow of production. Dini argues that the postmillennial novels ‘envision an extreme version of neoliberalism’ in which the migrant's status is of an ‘unwanted commodity or waste’ – a point that illuminates a striking dichotomy within *Kingdom Come*'s hyper-consumerist society of the spectacle, in which the inanimate commodities and goods that promise to fill the societal vacuum hold a radically higher value than the ‘waste’ represented by the human migrant (Dini: 2, 18-19). Dini's nuanced interpretation of the postmillennial novels supports, I argue, a Rancièrian reading of *Kingdom Come*, as those who are rendered unequal and denied political appearance in the Ballardian dystopia – ‘refugees, economic migrants, and the unemployed’, as Dini identifies – ultimately ‘interrupt the flow of production’ within neoliberalism's instrumentalising frameworks (Dini: 3). Their undermining of the neoliberal economic consensus represents, in Rancièrian terms,

a moment of the political and a disruption of the hierarchies, logics and inequalities of the prevailing police order. Furthermore, Ballard's dystopian depictions of the depoliticisation strategies and systemic violence that renders human beings as waste and seeks to, as Dini argues, 'produce pliable, unreflective subjects' – such as those that appear amongst the lonely crowds of *Kingdom Come* – connects the postmillennial fictions in their dissensual dystopian critiques of the neoliberal economic and political consensus that formed a vital element within New Labour's vision for a 'new politics' for twenty-first century Britain.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout *Kingdom Come*'s dystopian vision of consumerism and a post-political Britain, Ballard both illustrates the contemporary 'vacuum' argued for in his interview with Jeannette Baxter, and explores the question of what will fill this void of the socio-political imagination. Just as Maxted envisions the suburb of Brooklands as a 'perfect social laboratory' for his fascistic, ochlocratic political order, *Kingdom Come* depicts an uncanny political space – one that simultaneously verges on a prophetic, eschatological dystopianism and, in its evident malleability and in the novel's closing call for the 'sane' to awake and prevent the coming of such a kingdom, one that arguably remains fertile for resistance and transformation (*KC*: 210). While Ballard's critical position in *Kingdom Come* is more closely tied to a traditional form of dystopian 'warning' than to the 'minor' utopian counter-narratives and narrative moments of resistance found in Thomson's *Divided Kingdom*, Hall's *The Carhullan Army* and Gee's *The Flood*, the novel's critiques of the exclusionary police order that governs its dystopian society, and its speculations on the destructive forms of consensus that could depoliticise and divide twenty-first century Britain, suggest that – in line with the trajectory of recent critical work by Beaumont, Paddy and Dini – Ballard was indeed a writer who was

attuned to, and engaged with, the socio-political present in which he wrote. A Rancièrian reading supports Beaumont's argument that Ballard's late fictions 'critique the way in which flexibility has led to the atrophy of the political', as *Kingdom Come* depicts the reduction of the 'political' (*la politique*) to consensus (*la police*) within a dystopian neoliberal society (Beaumont: 95). This dystopian vision of neoliberal Britain, as Dini argues, routinely produces inequalities and renders societal groups as 'waste', supporting Beaumont's point that 'despite their apparent amorality, Ballard's late novels in fact voice deep consternation over the forms of violence that moral deferral enables' (Beaumont: 117). Paddy's nuanced reading of *Kingdom Come*'s exploration of contemporary Britain's increasing crisis of national identity and internal divisions, and Ballard's illustration of a dynamic where 'the suburbs play colonial outpost to metropolitan imperial London', further supports this chapter's focus on the discerning political nuances of the novel – including its charting of several emerging socio-political divisions that would contribute to the social and political instabilities surrounding events such as the 2011 UK riots, and the populist momentum that resulted in the 2016 Brexit vote (Paddy: 325).¹⁰⁴

Along the lines of this chapter's analysis, we might reasonably speculate that Ballard's implicit alternative to the dystopian near-future depicted in *Kingdom Come*'s vision of Britain is one in which the depoliticisation that plagues its political space is redressed, and replaced by a more participatory and egalitarian set of democratic values. In his work *Infinitely Demanding*, Simon Critchley reflects on the importance of such values to producing

¹⁰⁴ In his interview with Wakefield, Ballard preciently reflects on the connection between the UK's increasingly ambiguous sense of national identity and a growing socio-cultural antipathy towards the European Union: 'If you want an image of where this country is going physically, you should just get on to the M25. Look at the car rental shops, business parks and video shops where most people live. They don't live in Primrose Hill. That's why we should go into Europe regardless of any temporary financial problems. There's new life for us there, a larger canvas to paint ourselves upon. But we won't. Even though we're obsessed with leaving the country and talk of nothing but holidays abroad, we react with xenophobic terror to the thought of losing our national identity. If only we had an identity to lose...' (Wakefield: 24).

a better and more democratic twenty-first century politics. Critchley claims that a key element of this process of ‘democratization’ is the ‘dissensus’ that forms such a vital part of Rancière’s political philosophy; he argues that ‘democratization consists in the manifestation of a dissensus, in a demonstration as *demos*-stration, manifesting in the presence of those who do not count’ (Critchley: 131). In *Kingdom Come*, as this chapter has demonstrated, the preclusion of meaningful platforms for dissensus and democratic participation ultimately results in a nightmarish and violent manifestation of ‘those who do not count’, as the ochlocratic chaos of the crowd lashes out at the society that has created and maintained the disempowering, oppressive conditions in which they live. Critchley’s conception of ‘democratization’ as dissensus can be understood in opposition to the emergent politics of consensus critiqued by theorists such as Mouffe, Balibar and Burnham, as explored in this chapter. Like Mouffe and Balibar, Rancière suggests that when politics takes smooth consensus to be its supreme goal, democracy and democratic participation are often weakened as a consequence; in fact, as Peter Burnham’s article on New Labour claims, such a ‘politics of depoliticization’ can ultimately become ingrained in the fabric of governance itself. This chapter’s reading of Ballard’s depiction of depoliticisation in *Kingdom Come* ultimately argues that the novel, written and published during the New Labour era examined by Mouffe and Burnham, provides a radical dystopian vision of a British population living in a dangerous state of consensus. The ‘police order’ that binds the communities of Brooklands is constituted by the infantilizing consumer capitalism embedded in everyday life and the depoliticising far-right nationalism that both marginalizes ethnic minorities and fleetingly unites crowds in acts of destruction and violence – ensuring that the existential boredom of their state of consensus is only disrupted by outlets and forms of identification that perpetuate their depoliticised, politically powerless condition. *Kingdom Come* consistently suggests that strategies of depoliticisation result in a weakening of political subjectivity that precludes the

ability of the individual to recognise or alter the conditions that alienate or oppress them. Furthermore, the novel's illustrations of consumerism and neo-fascism are united by the destructive consensus of the crowds that stroll through the Metro-Centre, or rampage through the streets of Brooklands following sporting spectacles – ultimately suggesting that a politics without dissensus and disagreement is a mere 'police order', destined to weaken the public sphere and result in a deep-rooted democratic deficit. While the grim visions of Ballard's 'dystopian modernity' often suggest a political pessimism, the focused dystopian critique of the subtler forms of depoliticisation and destructive consensus in *Kingdom Come* – corroborated by Ballard's criticisms of misleading political rhetoric and depoliticisation strategies in his early twenty-first century interviews – evidences a firm and constructive desire for a more participatory, and less opaque, form of politics in contemporary Britain.

Chapter Four

‘Divided We Stand, United We Fall: Homogeneity, Abjection and the Politics of Partition in Rupert Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom*’

In the decade following the publication of Rupert Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom* (2005), division and fragility have remained as predominant themes of the recent socio-political history and cultural imagination of the United Kingdom. Thomson’s novel is both reflective, in his critical exploration of the social and political divisions of British society at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and prescient in his probing visions of the prospective consequences of the increasingly strained political unions of contemporary Britain and Europe. Writing on Britain’s long-standing ‘ache for a compelling, moral, national story’ in *Them and Us: Changing Britain* (2010), political economist Will Hutton contemplates the failure of both the British Conservative and Labour parties to convincingly capitalise on the ideological voids left by the crises of political values of the ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ in recent times; namely, the Eastern Bloc revolutions and dissolution of the Soviet Union (1989-1991) and the global financial crisis of 2008 (Hutton: 33). Reflecting on the first decade of Britain’s twenty-first century political history, Hutton draws attention to the opaqueness of narratives of the ‘Big Society’ and ‘One Nation’ Conservatism in the Conservative Party’s 2010 General Election manifesto, along with the failure of their opposition, led by Ed Miliband, to ‘create a convincing values driven big idea’ in return (Hutton: 33-34, 36). Hutton argues that in the wake of the twenty-first century’s uncertain social, political and economic futures, the British people now ‘need a national story of renewal, and policies to support it’, in place of the

exhausted modes of contemporary political discourse in which ‘we search in vain’ for such a direction (Hutton: 36). This fruitless search is finally over in *Divided Kingdom*’s imagined future, as the kingdom’s government produces a moral narrative of the nation upon which to base Britain’s future political order. The content of Hutton’s proposition is, in fact, recognised and endorsed by the novel’s version of the establishment, as ideological proponents such as Miss Groves affirm that the public ‘had to be given something fresh, something clear and powerful, with which they could identify’ (*DK*: 12). Cruelly, this radical change is not founded upon a value of socio-political fairness and the sustainability of the environment and economy advocated for by Hutton; instead, the evident goal of the establishment’s new narrative is biopolitical control, where the inconvenient disorder of an ever-dividing nation is resolved with a convenient solution, developed from a reductive account of human behaviours and societal harmony.

Written in 2005, *Divided Kingdom* extrapolates upon the national concern with disunion at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and during the course of Thomas Parry’s odyssey through a broken Britain its innovative dystopian critique interprets key preoccupations of the present socio-cultural and political moment. In 2014, the United Kingdom was very nearly divided by a hotly debated referendum on Scottish Independence. A late surge from the ‘Yes’ (to independence) campaign, and the gradual faltering of the ‘Better Together’ campaign’s media efforts, led the result to be closer than was ultimately expected, with 45 percent of the electorate voting to leave the UK. Prior to the election, Westminster’s leading politicians sought to cement ‘No’ votes to maintain Scotland’s place in the UK by guaranteeing further devolution of power from Westminster to Holyrood.¹⁰⁵ Despite the unity forged between Britain’s two main political parties on the common ground of keeping the kingdom together, political commentators such as Iain Macwhirter have

¹⁰⁵ For more on the Smith Commission Report’s proposals, see: <https://www.smith-commission.scot/>

argued that Britain is arguably more divided following the result of Scotland's independence referendum. Highlighting the unprecedented level of political activism and engagement following the referendum in his book *Disunited Kingdom* (2014), Macwhirter contemplates whether the referendum's fallout, both within and without the political establishment, has simply 'postponed' Scottish independence from the United Kingdom: 'The hundreds of thousands of Scots who have been persuaded that they need independence to create a fairer nuclear free society – they are not going to go away' (Macwhirter: 161). In the wake of winning 56 of 59 Scottish seats at the 2015 General Election, the Scottish National Party have already suggested that a failure to have their demands met in Westminster could lead to a revived interest in independence from Scottish supporters, as their party leader and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon indicated:

I have been very clear that, at least in part, the level of support for independence will be determined by what the Tory government at Westminster does, as well as what the SNP Government does. And there is no question that the great disrespect shown to Scotland in these proposals [for 'English votes for English laws', and the confirmed proposal for referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union] is likely to have more people asking whether Westminster is capable of representing Scotland's interests at all.¹⁰⁶

Similarly reflecting on the prospect of a British referendum on its EU membership (now scheduled to take place before the end of 2017), historian Linda Colley explores the phenomenon of Euroscepticism growing in twenty-first century Britain in her study *Acts of Union and Disunion* (2014). Colley provides a brief history of British Euroscepticism to convincingly argue that much of the emerging Euroscepticism of the contemporary moment may be rooted in 'a more unfocused uncertainty about identity at home' (Colley: 135). Presciently interpreting the prevalent socio-cultural and political anxieties surrounding the

¹⁰⁶ 'Nicola Sturgeon comments on Tory "EVEL" proposals'. snp.org (2nd July 2015). Accessed on 3rd July 2015: <http://www.snp.org/media-centre/news/2015/jul/nicola-sturgeon-comments-tory-evel-proposals>

future of Britain's domestic and international unions in the early twenty-first century, Thomson brings these fears to their culmination in *Divided Kingdom*:

What had been until then a united kingdom was broken down into four separate and autonomous republics. New borders were created. New infrastructures too. New loyalties. (DK: 11)

In *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+: New Perspectives in Literature, Film and the Arts* (2008), Eckstein, Korte and Pirker locate within *Divided Kingdom* many of the emergent leitmotifs of aesthetic responses to the multi-ethnic Britain of the twenty-first century, namely: 'a concern with identities and their construction, the question of a "burden of representation", evaluations of the current situation in Britain, as well as the issue of space and belonging' (Eckstein, Korte and Pirker: 13). Thomson's treatment of those issues, they claim, 'sheds an uneasy light on the multiculturalism debate of recent years' (Eckstein, Korte and Pirker: 11). Particularly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks that shook the West, Britain's 2003 invasion of Iraq and the 7/7 London bombings that took place in the same year of *Divided Kingdom*'s publication, 2005, Thomson's novel is chiefly concerned with the effect of political and social instability on socio-cultural belonging and identity in contemporary Britain, where concerns surrounding sustainability and collective prosperity have fuelled debates on the environment, the economy, immigration policies and Britain's role in the world.

This chapter argues that through a radical illustration of socio-political division, homogeneity and abjection within the kingdom's four partitioned republics, *Divided Kingdom* presents a nuanced exposition of the violence that myopic attitudes towards diversity and otherness produce in an increasingly divided Britain of the twenty-first century. The chapter's first section dissects and examines the 'Civil Rearrangement' imagined in the novel, with a particular emphasis on the insecurity and alienation that characterises civilian life following the implementation of the radical political programme. I elucidate how *Divided Kingdom*'s representation of a depoliticised public sphere is rooted in the 'spin' of politicians,

the corruption of authorities that are unaccountable to people they no longer serve, and the disempowering democratic deficit that precludes ordinary citizens' ability to transcend the homogeneous norms that are enforced within the borders of each republic. These features, I argue, are the primary cause of the endemic problems of disorganised civil disobedience in the novel's dystopian future, problems that reflect the emerging divisions between politics and the public sphere in twenty-first century Britain's early years. I subsequently conduct a theoretically-informed close reading of Thomson's illustration of 'the White People' in the novel, guided by the concept of 'abjection' as theorized by the post-structuralist philosopher Julia Kristeva in her work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), and developed by Imogen Tyler's sociological study on abjection in contemporary Britain, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (2013). The chapter concludes by exploring what is best described as 'the politics of beginning' in the novel. I argue that the ideological power of the government's dystopian political project in *Divided Kingdom* is rooted in its successful preclusion of the capability of the subject to begin anew – from the displaced individuals seeking to traverse the confines of republic borders, or the disconnected populations desiring democratic change in a society where they are victims of depoliticising policies and a destructive identity politics.

Democratic Deficit and the Politics of Partition

While Thomson develops his surreal and uncanny dystopian vision by resisting the present-day place names of the United Kingdom – names that the Civil Rearrangement has indubitably disposed of – the novel depicts a dysfunctional, disconnected Britain that has been partitioned in order to prevent its population from tearing itself apart. The capitals of each of the kingdom's quartered republics reside in a divided London, a city that now

resembles the splintered, Allied-occupied Berlin that resulted from the Berlin Declaration of 1945. Drawing from a vision of the Berlin Wall that later divided the city from 1961-1989, *Divided Kingdom*'s London is partitioned by the vast concrete walls commissioned by the government during the Rearrangement, walls that are lined with barbed-wire and marked by the presence of armed guards and strict checkpoints (*DK*: 18). Befitting to the homogeneity endorsed by each new republic, Parry learns from the government's concrete supplier that 'uniformity of product was vital [...] Every wall that was erected had to look the same' (*DK*: 218). Despite the government's claim that Owen, the supplier, had helped them to 'create a better world', he quickly realises that London's dividing walls now serve as the most powerful symbol of the 'misery' of life there (*DK*: 218). Equally symbolic are the watch towers that line the bridges of the Thames, and the 'mined wasteland' that Trafalgar Square has now become (*DK*: 78).¹⁰⁷ Andrew O' Hehir considers Thomson's meaningful satire of contemporary Britain, suggesting that:

One way of understanding *Divided Kingdom* is to suggest that all four of its zones represent contemporary Britain as seen through a different satirical scrim: The Yellow Quarter is violent, vulgar America-lite, while the Blue Quarter is a brooding, mystical nation of witches and pagans, and the Red Quarter belongs to sensible, upper-middle Labor Party voters. (And the Green Quarter is very clearly the bleak and shabby Britain of the postwar years)(O' Hehir).¹⁰⁸

While Thomson's deliberate lack of specificity arguably precludes the certainty of these connections made between the novel's setting and the present day – with the potential exception of Thomson's rare geographical hints, which place the overcast Green Quarter a 'long way north' of Parry's sunnier, more southerly Red Quarter – O' Hehir's claims highlight *Divided Kingdom*'s innovative style of dystopian critique, where frequent allusions

¹⁰⁷ Thomson resists explicitly naming these sites, however the 'famous admiral' overlooking the square invokes the image of Trafalgar Square; the bridges referenced here appear to be Southwark Bridge and the Tower of London (78).

¹⁰⁸ See Andrew O' Hehir (2005) '*Divided Kingdom* by Rupert Thomson'. Salon.com (June 24th, 2005) Accessed on July 3rd 2015: http://www.salon.com/2005/06/24/thomson_3/

to key social, cultural and political debates provide a platform from which the author interprets and challenges the contemporary Britain in which those debates rage (*DK*: 256).

In addition to the central subjects this chapter explores in more detail – namely, debates concerning the relationship between politics and the people, issues of widening disunion and division, inequality and intolerance in twenty-first century Britain – *Divided Kingdom* probes equally urgent questions of economic and ecological fragility. Throughout the novel, Thomson depicts an environment that has been corroded by the now exhausted industrial booms of the past. In the divided kingdom's less prosperous republics, murky streams of 'metallic' tasting water run through the bleak and sterile industrial heartlands of old, along with the enduring haze of skies 'creamy with pollution' (*DK*: 342; 352). Parry's journey takes him through the nation's abandoned waste-lands, litter-strewn urban spaces and decaying natural habitats, representing a future where environmental warnings have been cast aside for unsustainable industrial practices. 'Apocalyptic talk' thus becomes a common occurrence amongst the population, with the frequent destruction of gale-force winds and the Blue Quarter's dire predicament with flooding both serving as quotidian reminders of the precarious endgame of climate change within which the citizens of the divided kingdom find themselves (*DK*: 277). Equally fragile is the economic state of the novel's dystopian Britain. Reading a guide to the Blue Quarter, Parry learns that there, too, the economy is 'permanently on the brink of collapse' (*DK*: 102). The discourse of crisis surrounding the economy frequently appears to be a guise for the government's neglectful under-funding of public services in Parry's Britain, where the new borders and economic austerity of the Civil Rearrangement have seen a series of major railway stations closed down, along with the closure of the capital's long-standing tube service (*DK*: 32; 79). The relative affluence of the Red Quarter in which Parry has spent most of his life highlights the government's unequal investment throughout the rest of the kingdom, as we learn that despite the closure of the rail

stations in the Blue Quarter, a ‘bit of imagination and some capital investment’ will likely see a junction station open up in the southern Red Quarter to supplement a new south-western network (*DK*: 32). In the Blue Quarter, Parry encounters an economic poverty that he could never have imagined in his own quarter, with former business premises lying vacant and farms that have been abandoned, having been left unprotected from epidemics that cost farmers their livestock (*DK*: 115; 225).

The Green and Yellow Quarters have been similarly affected by the industrial collapse and growing poverty and inequality, as Parry realises during a visit to a formerly prosperous industrial town, Iron Vale, whose disused sites now merely ‘hark back to a more dynamic era, when local people had been full of energy and aspiration’ (*DK*: 268). The Green Quarter’s main city, Cledge, is similarly marked by boarded up shops, broken street lights and a restless population living without the hope of meaningful employment prospects and a better quality of life (*DK*: 255-256). In these descriptions *Divided Kingdom* interprets a particularly contentious issue of twenty-first century Britain’s early years. In a 2014 article in *The Guardian*, journalist Aditya Chakraborty assesses the problem of unequal investment in contemporary Britain, arguing that the ‘lopsidedness of Britain’s economy’ is a primary cause of the crises of housing and employment that dominate popular political discourse, with the ‘London bubble’ soaking up a disproportionate amount of government investment (Chakraborty: par. 2-3).¹⁰⁹ Between 2010 and 2015 Britain’s government, led by the plans of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, has moved to address the widespread public concerns that Chakraborty amplifies with a ‘Northern Powerhouse’ initiative, intended to correct Britain’s imbalance in infrastructural and industry investment.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Aditya Chakraborty (2014) ‘Britain’s economy is dangerously imbalanced – just look at the London property bubble’. Sunday 1 June 2014: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/01/britain-economy-dangerously-imbalanced-london-property-bubble>

¹¹⁰ For the government’s ‘Northern Powerhouse’ strategy, see: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/427339/the-northern-powerhouse-tagged.pdf

Critiques of this imbalance are compounded by the statistics of significant studies such as the 2014 findings from the ‘Inequality Briefing’, revealing that the United Kingdom’s poorest regions are the poorest in Northern Europe.¹¹¹ Britain’s structural and systemic inequalities are also the subject of critique in Gee’s *The Flood* and Hall’s *The Carhullan Army*, where (respectively) a London dichotomised by prosperous and poor sectors and an austere, under-resourced Cumbria are imagined. Historian Linda Colley claims that the ‘North-South’ divide, here imagined by Thomson, has highlighted the failure of the measures taken in the 1990s to devolve power more effectively from Westminster to regional parliaments and assemblies throughout England and the UK (Colley: 152-153). In England alone, Colley claims that the disproportionate power and investment afforded to London has estranged the North, to an extent, and poses ‘a challenge to English identity more broadly’ (Colley: 62).

Set against her illustration of a Britain rampaged by disorder, violence, racism, homelessness, divorce and a ‘northern, inward-looking’ barbarism, Miss Groves educates the young boys of the Red Quarter on the stirring national story of renewal in their carefully-designed education programme at Thorpe Hall (*DK*: 8). Describing the state of the nation prior to the Rearrangement, Miss Groves unfolds the story with a ‘gripping command of atmosphere and detail’, setting out the chaotic vision of a failed state, a crippled law and order system – with ‘overflowing’ prisons, ‘swamped’ courts and a ‘woefully under-manned’ police force – and a socio-cultural sphere obsessed with ‘acquisition and celebrity’ (*DK*: 8). The latter, a condemning indictment of the glamour, spectacle, and profit-driven materialism of neoliberal late capitalist life, echoes both J.G. Ballard’s sustained critique of consumerism in *Kingdom Come* and Maggie Gee’s satirical deconstruction of the spectacle in *The Flood*. The re-education programme’s assessment of pre-Rearrangement Britain portrays a

¹¹¹ For *Inequality Briefing*’s 2014 study on Britain’s inequality, see:
http://inequalitybriefing.org/graphics/briefing_43_UK_regions_poorest_North_Europe.pdf

compelling mix of social and political criticisms, drawing from both Left and Right political perspectives. While the Civil Rearrangement proposes a solution based in the quasi-Hippocratic conception of the ‘health’ of the body politic, the ideology behind the radical social experiment is eerily hollow, abandoning traditional political directions and narratives in order to redress the crises. Typical of Thomson’s probing and allusive style of critique, this great emptiness at the heart of the Rearrangement consistently suggests that a sterility and superficiality lies at the heart of the British political imagination at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Robert Skidelsky’s analysis of Britain’s recent political history in *Britain Since 1900: A Success Story?* (2014) notes that both academic and journalistic writing has often associated a malleable, opaque political standpoint with the New Labour government that oversaw Britain’s transition to twenty-first century life; the government at the time of *Divided Kingdom*’s writing and publication. According to Skidelsky, New Labour’s electoral successes in 1997, 2001 and 2005 – the last of which was won just a few weeks following Bloomsbury’s publication of *Divided Kingdom* – owed a great deal to a political strategy where both public opinion and the media ‘replaced political parties and ideologies as the central players, and in which control of the message was key to power’ (Skidelsky: 358). Prime Minister Blair’s ‘very political *emptiness*’, as Skidelsky terms it, was fundamental to his radical ‘modernisation’ of the Labour party and the ‘politics of electability’ at the heart of his success in Britain’s 1997 general election and beyond (Skidelsky: 360, 364). This modernisation involved the adoption of several neoliberal policies made popular during the premiership of Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990), along with his willingness to ‘spin’ New Labour’s positions and policies to either sway or adapt to the prevailing public opinion of the day (Skidelsky: 360). Reminiscent of Maggie Gee’s

President Bliss in *The Flood*,¹¹² Thomson too satirises the political culture of ‘spin’ that, particularly from the association of New Labour and Rupert Murdoch’s media conglomerate onwards, has grown to be a significant and controversial element of political discourse in twenty-first century Britain.¹¹³

Amidst the alienation of *Divided Kingdom*’s depoliticized republics, Parry observes the political propaganda of a leading politician named Michael Song, who proclaims himself to be ‘the Voice of the People’ (*DK*: 24). Song’s declaration stands out as a slogan of cruel irony within the novel’s vision of a Britain where politics appears to be something done *to* the people, rather than done *for* the people. Thomson here amplifies a recurrent theme of contemporary political disaffection within the dystopian imagination; a disaffection with the empty rhetoric of an elite ruling class of politicians who – rather than representing the ‘voice of the people’ – are complicit in the democratic deficit that deprives citizens of a voice and the means of effectively contesting the unequal, unjust and unsustainable conditions that they have been marginalised and aggrieved by. In a powerful article on the effects of the post-2008 recession in Europe, British writer and journalist John Lanchester identifies a general feeling of ‘bewilderment’ in the public’s responses to the economic crisis in countries such as the UK and Ireland (Lanchester: 6). Lanchester conveys how, in their developing understanding of the neoliberal, capitalist frameworks that have caused the economic fragility and austerity of the present moment, citizens are increasingly feeling that they have ‘very

¹¹² Bliss’s rhetorical claims about ‘our people’ and his political leadership can be found on p.254 of Gee’s *The Flood*.

¹¹³ In *Britain Since 1900: A Success Story?* (2014) Skidelsky traces this development of New Labour’s politics of ‘spin’ at the dawn of the twenty first century. Skidelsky writes that: ‘Blair, Brown and Mandelson all believed that manipulation of the media was the key to getting the New Labour “brand” across to the public [...] The core of the operation was “spinning” the news: trailing policy announcements, planting stories via favoured journalists, speedy rebuttals of negative stories, and so on [...] It was natural that Blair and Rupert Murdoch should find each other’ (Skidelsky: 366-367). New Labour employed political ‘spin’ most effectively during its first six years of government, which in particular was due to the influence and power afforded to Blair’s Director of Communications and Strategy, Alistair Campbell.

little economic or political agency, very little control over their own lives’ amidst the seeming precarity of their prospective futures (Lanchester: 6). Diagnosing a ‘disconnection between the political, the personal and the economic’ amongst the populations of many of the member states of an increasingly dividing European Union, Lanchester’s article highlights a present public anger at the political ‘done-unto-ness’ that, I argue, characterises *Divided Kingdom*’s representation of an increasingly unaccountable and undemocratic form of governance (Lanchester: 6). Michael Song, who is widely acknowledged as the Prime Minister in-waiting by the citizens of the Red Quarter, is first noticed by Parry for the ‘polished’ nature of his televised addresses to the nation (*DK*: 37). Parry learns that Song was a key figure in the legislation of the Civil Rearrangement, and the ‘underground meetings that altered the nation’s destiny for ever’ (*DK*: 23). There, Song and the rest of the Prime Minister’s cabinet decided the fate of Britain from within ‘secret chambers’, where they were assured to be ‘far from the eyes and ears of the electorate’ (*DK*: 8). Following his dystopian odyssey through the divided kingdom’s republics, Parry reflects on the clandestine nature of these meetings and realises that his nation is likely governed by a secretive committee, an unaccountable ‘higher authority’ that supersedes the largely futile elections of each republic (*DK*: 381). The Civil Rearrangement is thus the prime mover in this anti-democratic shift in political governance, an insidious shift that resurfaces in perturbing policies such as the government’s ‘Internal Security Act’, a broad and extensive mandate that we might interpret as a radical dystopian extrapolation of the controversial ‘USA PATRIOT Act’ signed in 2001 by President George W. Bush (*DK*: 12).¹¹⁴

Divided Kingdom unabashedly critiques the usage of crisis rhetoric to expedite or obfuscate the implementation of political policies that infringe upon freedom and forgo

¹¹⁴ For the US Department of Justice’s description of the USA PATRIOT Act, see: <http://www.justice.gov/archive/ll/highlights.htm>

democratic conventions, a Machiavellian manoeuvre that is most famously investigated by Naomi Klein's book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007). Illustrating Klein's argument that 'disaster capitalism' harnesses crises to aid the implementation of radical policies, Miss Groves weaves the establishment's misleading ethos in to her lectures on the history of the Civil Rearrangement at Thorpe Hall, stating that 'in times of crisis [...] the good of the many always outweighed the misfortunes of a few, especially when the health of an entire nation was at stake' (Klein: 6; *DK*: 11). Fittingly, during his time with the landlady of his Green Quarter home, Clarise, Parry observes how Clarise 'only ever invoked the law out of anxiety or panic', a statement that reveals how, in *Divided Kingdom*, the prevailing mode of civil law and political legislation is founded from - and flourishes within - the rhetoric of crisis (*DK*: 279). This insecure, anxious climate is, as Klein's analysis suggests, indicative of the 'elimination of the public sphere' and the preclusion of the democratic will of a disempowered population (*DK*: 18). Throughout the novel, the categorical imperative of the 'health of the nation' proves to be an insidious justification for the systemic abuse of power that has been enabled by the dispersal of the population between four isolated, depoliticised republics. During Thomas Parry's encounter with De Vere, a member of Parry's old class at Thorpe Hall, De Vere describes his experience of the regime's interrogations, illegitimate arrests and imprisonment without trial of citizens within the Blue Quarter, a series of misuses of power that have been legalised and validated by the 'Internal Security Act'. Parry learns of the reckless control enabled by the Act shortly following his stay at the Axe Edge Inn in the Yellow Quarter, where the authorities shut down the premises without any official warrant. As a bitter bystander remarks to Parry, the police 'don't need a reason [...] They can call it anything they want [...] I expect we were jeopardising national security' (*DK*: 186). The act serves as a broad means of suppressing dissent, arresting citizens of suspicion and 'initiating transfers' to displace and isolate the malcontents who need not

disappear from public sight through the justice system to ensure the ‘health of the nation’ (DK: 238).

The Yellow Quarter presents the government with its biggest challenge, with a particularly notorious area called ‘the Wanings’ being a hub for violence, rioting and ‘ungovernable’ behaviour (DK: 308). Despite witnessing the chaos of the Wanings first-hand, Parry is ultimately more disturbed by the authorities who enable such controlled violence, in addition to their own undermining of civil liberty, stating that ‘the Wanings may have lapsed into anarchy, but we had just as much to fear from the so-called forces of law and order, whose reputation for corruption and brutality was common knowledge’ (DK: 341). Parry’s own employers, the ‘Ministry for Health and Social Security’, are complicit in this corruption and systemic brutality, as the admissions of his companion and Ministry colleague Odell reveal. Both Parry and Odell are offered ‘immunity’ from further displacement and suspicion as a perk of their job offers at the Ministry, a legal immunity that enables the ‘shadowy activities’ of a department led by the corrupt Adrian Croy (DK: 333-334). Having witnessed a Croy-led Ministry’s brutality for his entire adult life, De Vere’s remarks in his meeting with Parry, however, suggest that the authorities’ dangerous wielding of power is a sign of their fear that the emerging disorder and dissent will rupture the oppressive order they have established. He argues that ‘you don’t have to be strong to abuse power [...] You can abuse it out of weakness or insecurity [...] Out of fear’, and introduces Parry to a disorganised group of dissidents, whom the government’s abuses of power has brought together (DK: 239). De Vere’s dissident arguments effectively elucidate Hannah Arendt’s thesis, from *The Human Condition* (1958), that violence inevitably erodes power within a social or political order (Arendt, 1958/1998: 203). *Divided Kingdom* presents the case that dissent and resistance will always emerge in settings where a political establishment is corrupt and violent. The cultivation of homogeneity through the enclosure of the four republics with strict borders

inevitably breeds discontent and resistance in the novel, creating an opposition that struggles with the fierce identity politics at play throughout the kingdom.

Divide and Conquer: Rearrangement, Identity, Resistance¹¹⁵

Drawing from Judith Butler and G.C. Spivak's 2007 work *Who Sings the Nation State? Language Politics, Belonging*, Imogen Tyler argues that 'the borders of the subject and the state are continually being made and undone' in contemporary Britain (Tyler: 46). In *Divided Kingdom*, Thomson imaginatively examines this purportedly unstable boundary between subject and state through a nuanced depiction of the impact of the physical and non-physical boundaries imposed by the establishment's Civil Rearrangement – which, in itself, is an ideological experiment in the making and unmaking of national (or republican) subjectivities through a fractious identity politics and the physical construction of boundaries and borders. At a time when legality is in a dangerous flux within the hands of an unaccountable political establishment, Thomas Parry realises, in light of Odell's subversive traversing of the republic's border, that illegal border-crossing is 'the only law that mattered' in the kingdom (DK: 366). This is due to the reality that – as Tyler, Butler and Spivak's theoretical trajectory suggests – the state is made and unmade by its relation to the subject, and the collective subjectivity of the nation. To cross a border in the divided kingdom as Odell does, therefore, is to transgress and undermine the very narrative upon which the kingdom and its body politic is held together. Border reinforcements are strict and extensive in order to prevent 'psychological contamination', which is *Divided Kingdom*'s Orwellian Newspeak for

¹¹⁵ My use of 'divide and conquer' in this chapter alludes to British imperial strategy, and the heritage of the 'divide and rule' that aimed to consolidate the power of the Empire, particularly in the Indian sub-continent. For an account of 'divide and rule' in this context, see Neil Stewart (1951) 'Divide and Rule: British Policy in Indian History', *Science & Society* (15.1), pp. 49-57. URL <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40400043> (Accessed 27/11/2018).

heterogeneity, diversity and the cross-pollination of ideas and values (DK: 28). Those who are bold enough to violate the prohibition on border-crossing or question the myopic values of their republic can be charged with the crime of ‘undermining the fabric of society’, a prison-worthy offense enabled by the notorious Internal Security Act (DK: 28). Parry realises his own ‘psychological contamination’ has taken place not long after his escape to the Yellow Quarter, where his encounter with protestors and his failure to identify with the symbolism of his own republic during the ritualistic event at the Axe Edge Inn lead him to fundamentally question the narrative and purpose of the Civil Rearrangement. He muses that ‘perhaps, in the end, the four countries didn’t vary as much as was commonly believed [...] Perhaps our famous differences were no more than convenient fictions’ (DK: 179). The unmaking of the subject and state boundary, Parry’s ‘psychological contamination’, poses a major threat to the smooth consensus cultivated by the depoliticizing identity politics of a divided kingdom. The kingdom can, however, control these minor episodes of ‘contamination’, as Parry’s psychological testing with Dr Gilbert – arguably an homage to the famous appointments of Winston Smith and O’Brien in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s Room 101 – shows. However, the threat would be near-fatal for the novel’s dystopian establishment if the *immaterial* borders and subjectivities created by the state were undone by a collective remaking of boundaries through democratic action and collective political appearance. The *material* borders constructed by the kingdom, then, are inextricably tied to both the ideological and political existence of the new status quo enacted by the Civil Rearrangement.

In ‘Seeds of Dystopia: Post-Politics and the Return of the Political’, Japhy Wilson and Erik Swyngedouw’s incisive introduction to *The Post-Political and Its Discontents* (2015), it is argued by the co-editors that ‘contemporary forms of depoliticization are characterised by the erosion of democracy and the weakening of the public sphere, as a consensual mode of governance has colonised, if not sutured, political space’ (Wilson and

Swyngedouw 5). In *Divided Kingdom* this consensual mode of governance – characterised by borders and isolation, opaque and anti-democratic political processes and a violent, self-policing identity politics within each republic – has equally sterilised the public sphere of meaningful discourse, and estranged the citizens of the kingdom’s sanguine, melancholic, choleric and phlegmatic quarters from any residual collective values they may once have shared. ‘The Rearrangement had created a climate of suspicion and denial’, Parry tells us, ‘people had buried the parts of their personalities that didn’t fit’ (*DK*: 44). The intrinsically agonistic nature of democratic politics has evidently been replaced unquestioned consensus in Parry’s Britain, which, according to Wilson and Swyngedouw’s analysis represents a veritably ‘post-political’ society. Thomson’s contestation of this mode of governance – an insidious form of hegemony that precludes disagreement and dissensus – presents a striking and nuanced critique of his present moment. In the fifth chapter of her study *The Democratic Paradox* (2000), Chantal Mouffe demonstrates her argument that contemporary political practice has increasingly sought to negate the conflictual elements of democratic politics, with several specific references to Tony Blair’s New Labour government. Mouffe argues that New Labour’s rhetorical ‘New Politics for the New Century’ had, at its core, an ideological claim to a ‘third way’ that transcended the antagonisms of social democracy and neoliberalism, and the old ‘left’ and ‘right’ (Mouffe 2000: 108). While the political astuteness of New Labour’s synergy of values and policies from both the left and right of the political spectrum led to considerable electoral success, Mouffe is critical of New Labour, arguing that their ‘third way’ political approach and evasion of the ‘language of redistribution’ effectively resulted in an abandonment of the struggle for equality and an ‘increasing acceptance of inequalities’ in British society (Mouffe 2000: 122-123). As Skidelsky’s earlier accounts and Mouffe’s polemic analysis suggest, New Labour’s political strategies were strongly dictated by the elements of popular opinion and discourse needed to win the favour of the press and

to procure public consensus. In his illustration of Michael Song and his gestures towards the ‘spin politics’ of twenty-first century Britain, Thomson takes a satirical swipe at his socio-political present. However, through *Divided Kingdom*’s sustained critiques of the subtler depoliticising, anti-democratic elements of this political present, Thomson presents a serious critical appraisal of the consequences of the consensual mode of governance that Mouffe’s theoretical work elucidates.

Divided Kingdom illustrates a radical dystopian vision of Britain where a consensual mode of ‘post-political’ governance is so embedded in society that even its dissidents affirm elements of the rhetoric behind the construction of borders, republics and the Civil Rearrangement’s implementation. Late in the novel, Odell, a malcontent who despises the Croy-led Ministry and the divisive rhetoric and conflict between republics, argues that:

Without borders they would return to the chaos of a quarter of a century ago. Without borders they would find themselves living in what used to be called, laughably in her opinion, the ‘united kingdom’ – a kingdom united in name only, a kingdom otherwise characterised by boorishness, thuggery and greed (*DK*: 335).

Odell is not the only dissident who subscribes to the prevailing consensus surrounding the Civil Rearrangement, with Parry’s colleague from the Yellow Quarter, Fernandez, similarly resenting the disorder that drifters like Parry cause within the kingdom. Fernandez confesses to Parry that he has never felt comfortable with his classification as a choleric, but true to that very classification, he finds himself growing angrier and more choleric over time, ultimately subscribing to the establishment-sponsored worldview created for him and his quarter (*DK*: 196):

‘What was so clever about the way they divided us,’ [Fernandez] said at last, ‘was that it more or less guaranteed that we would hate each other. I can’t help feeling a kind of contempt for you, for instance. It might be because of what you’re doing, and the effect it has on others, but it might simply be because of who you are’ [...] ‘It’s like racism, really, if you think about it,’ he went on. ‘I don’t mean the old racism. That’s dead and gone. I’m not interested in the colour of someone’s skin. It’s their thoughts that bother me. The new racism is psychological [...] If we don’t have someone to despise, we feel

uncomfortable, we feel we haven't properly defined ourselves [...] And the authorities knew that, of course. In fact, they were banking on it. [...] They took the worst part of us and built a system out of it. And it worked –' (DK: 195-196)

Despite witnessing the corruption and brutality of the authorities Fernandez describes, both he and Odell are nonetheless swayed by the rhetoric they are simultaneously aware and critical of. Their deep-rooted-fear of socio-political disorder demonstrates the resounding success of the establishment's radical curriculum and revised historical education, memorably witnessed by Parry at Thorpe Hall. In Odell and Fernandez's ultimate complicity with the establishment's narrative of the nation, Thomson illustrates the Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse's description of the insidious 'integration of all opposition in the established system' that characterises a 'one-dimensional society' of myopia, instrumental reason and homogeneous populations (Marcuse: xii). The Civil Rearrangement's careful re-education of the youth of Britain's brave new world ensures that the 'established system' remains safe from dissidents such as Parry and Odell, both of whom are conveniently and visibly situated in Ministry jobs, and even Rodriguez, a disaffected Trade Union member invited to present his nuanced understanding of terrorism at the Ministry's national conference. Rodriguez's admission of instinctive contempt for citizens Red Quarter citizens like Parry conveys Parry's own observation earlier in the novel; 'place someone in an environment for long enough and he starts to take on the attributes of that environment' (DK: 114). The phenomenon of individuals and collective groups effectively becoming who they have always been told they are within the confines of their republic's borders is a consistent feature of *Divided Kingdom*. Reflecting on his early years at Thorpe Hall, Parry observes that 'children of the red quarter was what we were [...] What we had become' and that 'we were learning about ourselves, what had happened in the recent past and what would happen in the near future [...] Our lives had become books that we couldn't put down' (DK: 6, 9). It is at the 'burning of the animals' ritual at the Axe Edge Inn that Parry

initially realises that he can no longer be the sanguine citizen he has been told to be, as he fails to summon ‘even the slightest twinge of loyalty or pride’ upon seeing the Red Quarter symbols at the event (*DK*: 167). Echoing the malleability of protagonists of seminal dystopian novels such as Graham, the Sleeper from H.G. Wells’s *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910), Guy Montag from Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) and Paul Proteus from Kurt Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* (1952), Parry subsequently takes on a series of worldviews and identities throughout his protean journey through the divided kingdom’s republics, assimilating in to the melancholic demeanour of the Blue Quarter, the aggressive choleric traits of the Yellow Quarter and the reflective, phlegmatic outlook of the Green Quarter. Thrilled and frightened in equal measure at Odell’s understanding of the experience of crossing borders, Parry describes the profundity of his existential confusion throughout that protean journey: ‘I mean it’s something you’re not even supposed to think about [...] When it actually happens, it’s almost impossible to separate all the things you’ve been told you’re going to feel, or imagined you might feel, from the actual feeling itself’ (*DK*: 231). The stereotypes, permissible thoughts and attitudes determined by the Civil Rearrangement have evidently altered Parry’s prejudices, preconceptions and understanding of life beyond the border of his designated republic.

The omnipresence of borders in the lives of the citizens of *Divided Kingdom*’s post-Rearrangement Britain frequently result in individual and collective desires for alternate spaces, diverse landscapes and experiences throughout the novel. Parry recounts in considerable detail the time he spent adventuring with Bracewell on the deserted motorways that lay as the disused remains of pre-Rearrangement Britain. The open spaces, freedom and aggressive, ‘choleric’ qualities of the motorways appeal to Parry, and present his imagination with dangerous, exciting possibilities amidst his sheltered, sanguine existence in the Red Quarter (*DK*: 36). In his descriptions of the concrete wasteland of the motorways, Thomson

conjures up a quasi-Ballardian aesthetic to demonstrate how the confined existence within strictly policed borders provokes a desire for something new and other. Parry feels he and Bracewell's adventures created another parallel existence, in a world where he feels that they 'could finally throw off the wariness that informed so many of our thoughts and actions, and be ourselves' (*DK*: 37). While exploring the motorways, the boys try to 'imagine what it was like before'; conveying how the rare alternate space not only presents Parry's imagination with a whirl of thoughts and visions of the future and parallel dreamlands, but also with a means of negotiating his past and attempting to reconcile that past with his fractured sense of subjectivity in his divisive, partitioned present (*DK*: 39). We learn in these passages that most bridges had been dismantled several years before, during the Civil Rearrangement. The sight of the 'brutal interruption' of abruptly destroyed roads resound with Parry, serving as an 'embodiment' of his own experience at the hands of the Rearrangement (*DK*: 81). Describing a road cut off just before the water's edge of the river, Parry notes how he was 'gripped by the sense of history that emanated from such places; they were like abandoned gateways, entrances to forgotten worlds' (*DK*: 82). Thomson's vision is ultimately a pessimistic one: Parry's self-confessed 'natural craving for symmetry and resolution', an effect of his fate at the hands of the Civil Rearrangement, leads him to join Bracewell in replicating the very world around him, as they 'fortify their headquarters against intruders' in their imaginative games (*DK*: 42). From Victor Parry's walks around the perimeter of the Red Quarter, the 'dimensions of the cage' as he puts it, to the commodification of the 'Border Experience' at tourist settlements near the looming horizon of the republic's walls, Thomson consistently depicts the widespread desire for alternative spaces of possibility within the partitioned kingdom imagined in the novel (*DK*: 90, 69). Thomas Parry wisely observes that 'it was in these eerie halfway places that one was able to appreciate the full power and extent of the Rearrangement', and appreciate the historical weight of the radical programme that has

irrevocably altered his life (DK: 70). The fascination with such spaces is ultimately drawn from a desire for difference and heterogeneity, however. Later in the novel, Parry yearns to visit the Yellow Quarters bustling port, as ‘ports were heterogeneous, chaotic, filled with strangers’ in contrast to the homogeneity of the republic surrounding them (DK: 186). As in Maggie Gee’s *The Flood*, the garden too becomes a significant heterotopic space, where Parry ‘could read or dream’ away from the chaos of his near-death experience attempting to return to the Blue Quarter (DK: 209). These rare, transient spaces often incite feelings of hope and possibility for Parry, away from the daunting confines of the enormous walls that have partitioned the kingdom.

Contemplating the Rearrangement’s damaging effects, Parry muses that ‘there were very few who didn’t live in the shadow of some separation or other [...] The divided kingdom was united after all, by just one thing: longing’ (DK: 276). This longing in *Divided Kingdom*, a result of the fragmented nature of individual and collective experience within the estranging environments of each republic, consistently finds a fleeting fulfilment in the momentary magnetism of the crowd. Towards the novel’s end, Thomson – notably pre-empting the crowds of frenzied supporters imagined in Ballard’s *Kingdom Come*, published only a few months later – presents us with a vision of frenetic football fans surging through the streets, reminding Parry of the waves of a rough sea crashing against one another (DK: 347). Crowds figure throughout *Divided Kingdom*, and it appears that at the novel’s end Parry comes to understand the individual’s attraction to the experience of the crowd within the alienation of his present.¹¹⁶ Recalling Miss Groves’ aphorism at Thorpe Hall, that ‘people have to have something they can identify with [...] They have to feel they’re part of something’, Parry understands that the ‘tribalism’ of the crowd is rooted in the ‘deep need to belong’ that the

¹¹⁶ For the more minor descriptions of *Divided Kingdom*’s crowds left untreated in this chapter, consult pages 155, 166-167, 297, 313.

Civil Rearrangement's disruption and chaos has resulted in (*DK*: 346). In *Divided Kingdom's* thoroughly divided society, individuals seek belonging and agency through the identity, or 'humour', they have been allocated. However when that sense of belonging fades for Parry, at the Axe Edge Inn's 'burning of the animals' ritual, it is in the crowd that his emptiness is fleetingly fulfilled:

Slowly the volume grew, the voices becoming less distinctly individual, less obviously human. I thought of a swarm of bees, a reverberation that was partly music, partly noise, and I found that I had been caught up in it and that my voice had merged with theirs. I was ridding myself of burdens I had been carrying for years – the collusion, the deceit, the lies I had told to others, and to myself as well [...] That was all we were just then, a single voice raised against the elements, a resonance, a kind of harmony (*DK*: 311-312).

While participation in this quasi-spiritual crowd experience leads Parry to a mollifying sense of release, it is notable that the unison of the moment results in a 'single voice', and in voices becoming 'less distinctly individual'; suggesting that even in the crowd's dissent from a society that has reduced the individual to a designated identity or humour, the individual and the momentary collective identity is one that equally precludes plurality and individual difference. The individual's disappearance within the crowd is evident throughout Parry's journey through dystopian Britain. In the Blue Quarter, Parry is confronted by the mysterious stranger who subsequently dissolves in to the Quarter's 'sluggish' crowds 'like a swimmer caught by a rip-tide, or a drowning man being taken down for the third time' (*DK*: 100). Parry notes how these crowds of the Blue Quarter 'moved with so little purpose, with such lack of certainty', mirroring the indeterminacy and indecision of their melancholic disposition (*DK*: 100). This indeterminacy of the crowd is resolved, however, in the archetypal 'crowd-leader' dynamic explored in this thesis's work on the crowds of Gee's *The Flood* and Ballard's *Kingdom Come*. The 'Master', whom Parry discovers to be the leader of the 'Black Square' dissident group, displays his mastery in captivating the crowd and rousing them to participation in the 'burning of the animals' ritual that signals a rejection of the established

order of the divided kingdom (*DK*: 169). Parry describes the formless, faceless mass of the crowd in the control of the Master, ‘heads silhouetted against the sky’, with ‘every face [...] turned in the direction of the Master’ (*DK*: 169). Parry too mistakes the White People for ‘a large flock of sheep’ later in the novel, consolidating Thomson’s pessimistic vision of the crowd as a site that is complicit in the processes of deindividualisation that characterises the very identity politics that has resulted in the crowd’s desire for belonging and unity (*DK*: 225).

The crowd is, however, not an entirely ineffective force in *Divided Kingdom*, as Parry’s recounting of the transgressive collective song that unifies the masses present at the Axe Edge Inn for the ‘burning of the animals’ ritual:

Meanwhile, in the bar, a fair-haired man had stood up on a table and begun to sing. The tune was that of a traditional ballad, but the words belonged to a protest song. All people were different, he sang, but if one looked beneath those differences, all people were the same. We had to be allowed to live together, to complement one another. That was where true freedom lay. A subversive idea, of course, if not a kind of treason, and it was then that I realised exactly how far I had travelled [...] The room almost burst apart as everybody joined in with the chorus, which demanded that we overthrow the current leadership. (*DK*: 166)

Parry later learns, through the presence of the Master, that this event is one likely led by ‘The Black Square’, a reportedly terrorist organisation that stands for the reunification of the kingdom (*DK*: 151). The group are rumoured to be at the source of many of the crowd-led disturbances within the yellow quarter, with rioting following the Quarter’s curfew hours a regular occurrence, along with the infrequent burning of the symbols of the kingdom’s quarters (*DK*: 24). The barmaid of the Axe Edge Inn describes these dissident activities as ‘our little gesture[s] of rebellion against the way things are’, a daring visible rejection and rebellion from the consensus of post-Rearrangement Britain (*DK*: 164). Parry comes to understand his escape, following the bomb that disrupted the Yellow Quarter conference, as a similar expression of dissensus: ‘it seemed to me that what I’d done was both defy those in

power and take a kind of revenge on them [...] It had been my way of saying, No, I won't accept what you offered me. And no, I'm not going to be grateful' (DK: 266). The dissent and dissensus of crowds and groups such as 'The Black Square' is a result of the inhibiting borders and governing identity politics that divide Divided Kingdom's society following a violent Civil Rearrangement – elements that Freud's analysis in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) would diagnose as internal 'garrisons' of their society that protect the prevailing order (Freud 1930/2004: 77).¹¹⁷

The 'White People': Becoming-object and the Predicament of the Voiceless

In *Revolting Subjects*, Imogen Tyler develops her argument for social abjection as a 'theory of power, subjugation and resistance', and provides illuminating accounts of the abjects cast down by unequal, stigmatising conditions in contemporary Britain. (Tyler 4). Drawing on feminist, post-colonial and post-structuralist theories, Tyler reworks existing concepts of abjection in the work of Georges Bataille, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Frantz Fanon in order to present a rich assessment of abjection's effect on whole groups of British society, with a particular focus on the rioting crowds of 2011's summer of unrest in the UK, asylum seekers, the poor and the Gypsy and Traveller community.¹¹⁸ In the book, Tyler seeks to build a fuller account of abjection 'as a lived social process' (Tyler: 4), pinpointing how neoliberal ideologues in Britain have – via politics, mass media and culture - embedded harmful images of abject subjects in to the public imagination, with the objective

¹¹⁷ 'Civilization overcomes the dangerous aggressivity of the individual, by weakening him, disarming him and setting up an internal authority to watch over him, like a garrison in a conquered town' (Freud, 1930/2004: 77).

¹¹⁸ The *OED* defines 'abjection' as:

'1 (a). The state or condition of being cast down or brought low; humiliation, degradation; dispiritedness, despondency.

1 (b). The action or an act of casting down, humbling, or degrading; an act of abasement, esp. of oneself.

2. That which is cast off or away, esp. as being vile or unworthy; refuse, scum, dregs. Chiefly *fig.* of persons.

3. The action of casting out or away; rejection.'

of procuring public consensus for policies and attitudes that intensify unequal and insecure conditions for those who have been cast down (Tyler: 4). Commentators including Owen Jones and Gareth Price have also meaningfully explored the ways in which particular groups are made abject by the destructive and exclusionary attitudes of the state and society, such as ‘chavs’ and those in receipt of welfare benefits. In *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (2012), Jones investigates of how the demonization and stereotyping of the working class has contributed to a ‘broken Britain’, where this destructive lens of class hatred leaves serious issues of widening inequality and socio-political disenfranchisement unexamined by politicians, the media and the general public (Jones 2012: 185). Price, propelled by the public furore and disagreement surrounding Channel 4’s television series *Benefits Street* (2014), writes in his article ‘Decoding Benefits Street: how Britain was divided by a television show’ that, in fact, ‘the narratives in Benefits Street have a human and poignant quality, often presenting decent and compassionate people disenfranchised by an unfair society’ (Price: par.6). In contrast to the dehumanising images of ‘benefits scroungers’, as Jones critically terms the damaging label in his later work *The Establishment: And How They Get Away With It* (2015), Price notes the alternative vision present in a critical viewing of *Benefits Street* (Jones 2015: 180). Reading the deeply problematic and controversial nature of the show through Stuart Hall’s cultural theory, Price argues that this constructive image may well be overshadowed and ‘lost in the decoding by the subjective and ideological biases of various audiences’, with viewers of the political Right and Left both primarily using the debate surrounding the show to advance their respective narratives in the media (Price: par.7). In his exposition and appraisal of the projected annual costs of the government’s subsidies to the private sector in the fifth chapter of *The Establishment*, Owen Jones also claims that such a media-endorsed stigmatization is ideological in essence. Jones argues that ‘scrounger’ is a derisive insult that is ‘almost exclusively used against the poorest’, while government

complicity in the tax avoidance and exorbitant subsidies of private corporate interests escapes such a degree of scrutiny from the public sphere (Jones 2015: 180). Commentators such as Price and Jones thus support Tyler's argument that, in addition to the quotidian effects of key exclusionary policies of its contemporary neoliberal governance, Britain's media plays an integral role in the shaping of disparaging socio-cultural outlooks, and consequentially, the formation of abject subjects.

A striking claim of Tyler's work *Revolted Subjects* is that neoliberalism's ever-increasing colonisation of the political sphere is a primary driving force in the state's abjection of sections of the population. Tyler asserts that 'as [neoliberal] governments have come to govern for the markets they have also come to govern *against* the people' (Tyler: 6). Influenced by Butler and Spivak's *Who Sings the Nation State?* (2007), Tyler explores how 'both states of being and nation-states [...] are made and unmade through abjection' (Tyler: 21). This particular analysis is befitting to Thomson's *Divided Kingdom*, where abjection is a prevalent, insidious presence at the heart of the individual's lived experience within a volatile social environment, shaping their very 'state of being', and further reinforcing the government's control over its disempowered subjects. The kingdom's optimal state of being, 'eucrasia', is one where a harmonious balance between the humours is struck in the human body (28). The giddy and lame state, as evidenced in the unsettling behaviour of Mr Page in the book's early sections, is one that proves most conducive to procuring consensus for the prevailing order. Accordingly, it is the aspiration for the 'health' of a body politic that has been rendered lame and sterile by the Civil Rearrangement. While the murky unaccountability of the government's rule makes it unclear whether its *raison d'être* is neoliberal or purely biopolitical in essence, the novel very clearly illustrates – as Tyler describes it – government '*against* the people'. Disgust and hatred pervades the divided kingdom, and is foundational to the ability of its four republics to draw and reinforce their

borders. Interpreting a variety of sentiments and socio-political debates surrounding immigration, belonging and prejudice, Thomson most skilfully represents abjection through the novel's accounts of 'the White People' – those who provoke the disgust, bewilderment or hatred of the republics through which they roam.

Julia Kristeva's influential study, *Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection* (1982), provides a striking account of abjection that best articulates the predicament of the White People in Thomson's imagined future. For Kristeva, abjection is the horror and revulsion of the human subject's encounter with a subject or object whose radical Otherness and boundary-shattering 'Real' renders the encounter as one that fundamentally challenges the subject with a crisis of meaning, and a crisis of identity in the self's relation to the world, the other and itself. Kristeva describes the abject as

A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (Kristeva: 2)

The abject, for Kristeva, inspires a significant set of crises for the subject, but furthermore, functions as a 'safeguard' through which the subject consequentially draws and redraws its boundaries and limits. Abjection incites visceral feelings of hatred and disgust, provoking existential anxiety and a gripping lure over the subject;

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside: sickened, it rejects (Kristeva: 1).

As Kristeva notes above, the abject 'cannot be assimilated', and is the Other that unsustainably weighs on the boundaries of that which the subject considers to be 'tolerable'

and ‘thinkable’. Ultimately, then, the subject ‘rejects’ it, and abjects in order to remake the boundaries and distinctions shattered by the encounter.

Kristeva’s vivid, flowing account of abjection resonates with *Divided Kingdom’s* portrayal of the White People, and illuminates the significance of Thomson’s rendering of abjection in challenging the emerging forms of intolerance and systemic inequality in twenty-first century Britain. The White People, the peculiar population of nomads who exist on the peripheries of society, indubitably present a novel challenge to the subjectivity of the citizens of the kingdom, as well as to Thomas Parry himself. The White People are the abjects who, in Kristeva’s words, ‘cannot be assimilated’ in to the kingdom’s quartered republics due to their strict policing of normative identity, behaviours and permissible attitudes. As Victor explains to a younger Thomas, the White People are marginalised and ‘helpless’ people who ‘deserved better’ from the society that had disposed of them amidst the destruction of the Civil Rearrangement (*DK*: 125). They must wear white, to symbolise their lack of allegiance and belonging to any of the unifying colours of the four republics, and have been forced to live in ‘out of the way places’ where their radical difference will not disrupt the homogeneity each republic expects of its citizens (*DK*: 227). Thomas recalls his discussion with Victor, who explains that

‘They were society’s untouchables [...] The past had been taken from them, as it had been taken from everyone alive at the time of the Rearrangement, but these were people who had been either unwilling or unable to find a place in the future. They didn’t fit in to any quarter, he said, or any humour. They had ended up marooned between the old kingdom and the new one’ (*DK*: 125).

Carving out a fragile existence, cast away in the transition between the old and new kingdom, the White People suffer from physical and existential homelessness in Britain’s brave new world, as a mocking chant directed at them by young boys suggests: ‘You don’t belong/ You don’t fit/ You’re not a he/ You’re an it’ (*DK*: 125). Deemed by the government as ‘incapable of psychological damage’ to the populations of each republic, the White People are, however,

among the few who are permitted to cross the borders of each quarter (DK: 125). Upon joining the White People, following his arrest and relocation to the Green Quarter, Parry reflects on the unusual legislative liberty afforded to the group of abjects, who – despite this freedom of sorts – are all the while still rendered unfree from both the systemic violence of the prevailing mode of governance and from brutal treatment at the hands of the people, particularly in the Yellow Quarter. Parry believes, during his time with the White People, that this mere perception of freedom may even lie behind some of the brutality shown towards them:

‘We were limited, imprisoned, but they [the White People] walked free’ (DK: 281).

‘We [the White People] were outcasts and rejects, but at the same time we could go wherever we pleased [...] In being cut loose from society, we had been liberated from the pressures and responsibilities of daily life. Perhaps, at some deep level, people were envious of that’ (DK: 303).

This envy inevitably plays a role in the stigmatisation and hatred shown towards the White People, and the fury of the mobs of ‘the Wanings’ seeking to cleanse the Yellow Quarter of their presence. Drawing from Parry’s above quote, their status as ‘outcasts and rejects’, validated both by public consensus and government policy, is the fundamental driving force behind the violence shown to the itinerant group. Their status as abjects, their colourlessness, the radical alterity of their behaviour and way of life proves to – as Kristeva’s theory articulates – unsettle and challenge the insecure subjectivity of the ‘rearranged’ citizen(s) of the kingdom.

In *Revolted Subjects*, Tyler argues that abjection functions as a ‘memory hole’ for the colonial history of the French republic in Kristeva’s writing (Tyler: 32). Cleverly drawing upon Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), Tyler refers to the tool used by the ‘Ministry of Truth’ to incinerate documents and records that have either been revised to consolidate the Party’s propagandist narratives, or, most strikingly, to wipe the recorded existence of human beings or events from the face of the earth entirely. In *Divided Kingdom*, abjection similarly

functions as an Orwellian ‘memory hole’ for the violence done to the population by the government’s radical Rearrangement programme. Abjection serves as a means of concealing the widespread feelings of displacement, discontent and anger that might otherwise unify citizens across the four borders of the kingdom against the establishment. Instead, insidious state endorsements of republican fervour and hatred, rooted in the symbols and psychological moods of each quarter – precisely that which Fernandez understands as ‘psychological racism’ – along with the stigmatisation of groups like the White People create a ‘memory hole’ through which the potential for collective political agency slips away (DK: 195-196). The spectre of Orwell in *Divided Kingdom* is furthermore present in Parry’s statement that the White People ‘had been certified as non-persons’, an unnerving description of statelessness that parallels with Orwell’s notion of the ‘unperson’ in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (DK: 281). ‘Unperson’ is *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s Newspeak term for an individual who has been ‘vaporised’ by the state – not only killed, but erased from public records and forcibly forgotten in the mind of Party members through the psychological tool of ‘doublethink’ (Orwell 1949/2003: 38). Like Winston Smith, Parry too works for ‘the Ministry’ in *Divided Kingdom*: the ‘Ministry for Health and Social Security’, a suspiciously innocuous title for a department that provides the job description of ‘civil servant, psychologist and detective’ to Parry, with a view to ensuring the health and security of the nation by strengthening border controls and preventing ‘psychological contamination’ (DK: 11; 28). Caused by the disruption of homogeneous republics with the values and attitudes of others, the kingdom’s fuelling of fears of ‘contamination’ serve as crucial factors in the abjection and hatred of the ‘impure’ Other. Alluding to Orwellian conceptions, terms and symbols is far from uncommon in dystopian writing since 1949, however in *Divided Kingdom* Thomson subtly brings this Orwellian idea to bear within the framework of particularly heated discourses of immigration, nationalism and growing questions surrounding political (dis)union in twenty-first century

Britain. Connecting to Orwell's illustrations of non-personhood, Thomson brings these prevalent themes and debates to the surface through a meaningful exploration of the systemic violence that befalls the stateless, and ultimately the wider devaluation of human life that statelessness, and social and political attitudes towards the displaced, often entail. While observing the White People taking refuge in the quiet of a cemetery, Parry ponders that 'one could argue that White People were dead too [...] Dead in the eyes of the authorities at least [...] Bureaucratically dead' (*DK*: 269). Throughout the novel, Parry consistently describes the systemic violence of the government's 'rearrangement', casting away or displacement of individuals through terms such as 'death' and 'murder'. He gradually becomes more confident in doing so due to his journeys across previously forbidden borders, where his witnessing of the effects of such bureaucratic violence – effects that life in the more protected, privileged Red Quarter had obscured – enables him to finally recognise it as violence. His dystopian odyssey confirms to him what he had suspected for some time, that, despite the misleading crisis rhetoric surrounding the Civil Rearrangement, the move had been a brutal ideological one, where the violence done to him and the White People was state-sponsored and necessary for the smooth functioning of Britain's brave new world.

Abjection is evidently an inherent feature of *Divided Kingdom*'s politics of partition explored in this chapter's first section, however the more pronounced violence done to society's abjects is rooted in what Kristeva describes as a 'primal repression', the 'ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat.' (Kristeva: 12). This repeated division and rejection of the Other – the White People, in this case – is a repression, and violence enacted as a result of this repression may be understood as an attempt to purge the impure, unclean or less-than-human from the subject's field of perception. In his revised account and analysis of Kristeva's theory of abjection, Robbie Duchinsky neatly argues that 'impure phenomena are those in which heterogeneity is seen to disturb a

qualitative homogeneity' (Duchinsky: 709). Duchinsky highlights the broader social issues disclosed by Kristeva's theory by highlighting a pivotal point; that to abject is to preclude Otherness, diversity and heterogeneity. *Divided Kingdom* illustrates this point powerfully, with Parry's stark descriptions of the brutal treatment of the White People further exposing the threat that homogeneity poses within homogeneous republics. When making his final border crossing and disguised as one of the White People, Parry overhears one of the state's border guards vehemently exclaim that the White People are 'worse than animals' (*DK*: 370). In his encounters with the armed border guards of the Yellow Quarter they, on both occasions, seek to establish 'their own superior status as a species' (*DK*: 300). The White People, despite their powerless status and peaceful behaviour, constitute a threat to their subjectivity and way of life, and are consequently dehumanised and treated with contempt. The novel's most disturbing scene is testament to this violent reaction, describing a Yellow Quarter guard's sexual assault of a female White Person while the group are detained at the border. Both the victim of the assault and her detained, powerless group carry on following the incident with an unsettling and muted reaction, so accustomed are they to the abuse. Parry observes that they had each been 'rendered numb by the endless horrors to which they had been subjected' as 'non-persons' of the state (*DK*: 303-304). The pitiless treatment of society's 'scapegoats', from the gleeful jeering they receive when passing through more populated areas to the ideological attacks that those from the Wanings area of the Yellow Quarter carry out on them, is enacted with a cruel element of enjoyment, or '*jouissance*', as Kristeva terms it: '*Jouissance* alone causes the abject to exist as such [...] One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [...] Violently and painfully [...] A passion.' (Kristeva: 9)

To encounter the White People is to encounter a people living without the myopic identity politics that holds a fragmented state, and fragmented populations, together. Unrealised by the authorities, it is through the White People that the citizens of the divided

kingdom encounter the emptiness of the constructed subjectivity (and intersubjectivity) laid out for them to live their lives in accordance with. Rather than provoking aggression against the establishment, this emptiness – the true horror of the abject – instead incites a hatred and dehumanisation of those who have been disempowered and discounted. In *Revolting Subjects*, Tyler argues that the paradigm of social abjection reveals that ‘state power relies on the production of abject subjects to constitute itself and draw its borders’ (Tyler: 4). Her claim connects with Thomson’s vision of a dystopian Britain in *Divided Kingdom*, where abjection is yet another means of consolidating biopolitical control and preventing diversity and collective democratic action or political appearance within the social and political spheres constructed in the novel. Drawing from Hannah Arendt’s posthumously published work *The Promise of Politics*, Alexander Beaumont explores the relationship between political freedom and political action in his introduction to *Contemporary British Fiction and the Cultural Politics of Disenfranchisement* (2015). Beaumont states that ‘since an act must be exercised within political space in order to be free, the limits of this space are also the limits of freedom’ (Beaumont 2015: 16). In a development of her insightful analysis of political action and power, which appears most influentially in her earlier work *The Human Condition* (1953), Arendt claims that political freedom is a ‘spatial construct’, stating that ‘whoever leaves his polis or is banished from it loses [...] the only space in which he can be free’ (Arendt 2005: 119). According to this analysis, Thomas Parry is sorely mistaken in his characterisation of the White People’s indeterminate nomadism as a freedom. On the contrary, their existence as abjects of the socio-political order, their invisibility, voicelessness and statelessness condemns them to radical unfreedom. They possess neither a ‘freedom from’ (negative liberty) nor ‘freedom to’ (positive liberty), as Isaiah Berlin’s essay ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ conceptually elucidates (Berlin: 169, 178). Arendt and Berlin’s thoughts powerfully reveal the relationship between the radical partitioning of the kingdom and the

post-political condition that, evidently, has resulted in the unfreedom of both the stateless White People and the wider population of the kingdom's citizens. If the relationship between political freedom and spatiality holds some truth, as Arendt claims, then not only are the abjects and outliers of the system unfree; the implementation of strict spatial confines and the destruction of meaningful public and political spheres render every individual outwith the Ministry as both 'unfree from' the systemic violence of a dystopian political system, and 'unfree to' effect any meaningful change to the myopia ingrained in a kingdom where radical division of the population ensures the unity of a corrupt, dangerous political establishment.

Nativity and The Politics of Beginning

Divided Kingdom is a novel that expertly exhibits dystopian fiction's archetypal temporal experiment of 'proleptic analepsis' – or, more simply, of looking back at our present from the future. Not only does the book challenge our present from a speculative future, Thomson's novel also illustrates Thomas Parry's attempt to reconcile the alienation of his present moment from the past that has been lost, ruptured and rewritten by the kingdom's Civil Rearrangement. Throughout *Divided Kingdom*, however, this negotiation of past and present emphasises an eerie lack of discourse and thought surrounding the future – both for Parry and each of the secondary characters that Thomson illustrates in the novel. Early in the novel, the young Parry glimpses 'the thin strip of gravel at the end of the corridor had the brightness of another world, a world that lay beyond this one', and imaginatively yearns for a brighter, exciting future away from the confines of Thorpe Hall (*DK*: 16). Thorpe Hall also leaves a lasting effect upon his classmate Bracewell, upon Parry's meeting with him as an adult in the Blue Quarter. Bracewell plans to 'move to the city' and 'start a new life', however Parry observes how 'he appeared to want to laugh at that point, but he couldn't get his mouth to assume the right shape [...]' (*DK*: 57). Bracewell appears to be on the verge of an ironic laugh when discussing his plans, but is suspended between sneering and sobbing, cynicism

and hope. Parry can indubitably relate to this terrifying perplexity, stating himself that ‘I couldn’t imagine where I’d be in six days, let alone six months’ and that he ‘couldn’t actually visualise a life’ upon his eventual return to the Red Quarter (DK: 228). Most tellingly, Owen, the leader of the Epicurean ‘Church of Heaven on Earth’ remarks that ‘if we were going to change the atmosphere, he told us, we would have to look outside ourselves’, revealing a widespread lack of belief in that which is ‘within’ themselves, and their ability to effect even a minor change in their society (DK: 212, 218). Evidently, the formidable borders constructed by the government, along with the boundaries and distances created and maintained by the identity politics of the four republics, have rendered the future as a perplexing, insecure prospect. Arguably, Thomson’s intriguing negotiation of temporality may again invoke Fredric Jameson’s notion that in our present moment the world’s end appears to be easier to imagine than the end of our prevailing socio-political status quo, and arguably conveys the ubiquitous order described by Francis Fukuyama’s provocative consideration of the post-political elements of late-twentieth century Western liberal democracy as the ‘end of history’.¹¹⁹ However two key examples from *Divided Kingdom* suggest that Thomson, rather than simply providing a broad social and political commentary on our present relation to a precarious and unstable prospective future, instead provides a more nuanced understanding of the subtly dystopian elements of our present moment. I argue that those examples – Thomas Parry’s two meaningful engagements with children at the beginning and end of his time as one of the White People – most effectively illustrate *Divided Kingdom*’s concern with the powerful effects of the removal of the individual and collective ability to *begin anew*.

According to Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958/1998), the ability to begin and create anew is fundamental to the individual and collective existence of human

¹¹⁹ Jameson’s explicit claim is that ‘it seems easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism’ (2009: 50). For Fukuyama’s analysis of the concept of the ‘end of history’, see his influential study *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992/2012).

beings, and the '*vita activa*' – comprised of work, labour and action – that is a 'prerequisite for the life of free, public action' (Beaumont 2015b: 53). Arendt argues that 'natality', both defined by birth and the human being's intrinsic capacity for new beginnings, is the 'central category' of political thought: 'the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting' (Arendt 1958/1998: 9). Through this capacity to act in the public sphere, to 'begin something anew', the human being 'appears' in the world and its public realm. Action rooted in natality is, for Arendt, crucial in our collective task to 'provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers' (Arendt 1958/1998: 9). Arendt's use of the term 'stranger' is particularly appropriate for *Divided Kingdom*'s portrayal of a cultural crisis of national identity, anti-immigration rhetoric and policies, and the othering of society's abjects. Furthermore, the novel consolidates Arendt's description of the child as an existential 'stranger' through compelling representations of children who are evidently without the prejudice and hatred of difference that the kingdom's socio-political grand narratives of claim to be an innately human condition. In his analysis of Arendt's theory of natality, Beaumont notes that at the core of the concept is 'a feeling of hope which anticipates the renewal of the life process, the world and – most importantly – the *vita activa*, along with all the new action the latter makes possible in the future' (Beaumont 2015b: 53). Precluding this feeling of hope and 'new action', *Divided Kingdom*'s political establishment effectively inhibits the natality that Arendt argues is fundamental to the human condition. The inhibiting borders, corrupt policing and democratic deficit of Thomas Parry's Britain create a despondent, impotent population who, in a setting characterised by uncertainty and precarity, can at least rest assured of their inability to effect social change and new individual or collective beginnings.

The preclusion of the individual's ability to begin anew, in the Arendtian sense, is evident throughout *Divided Kingdom*. Beginning and natality's broad conception of 'birth' are key preoccupations in the novel, and, intriguingly, they are most frequently articulated and understood by Thomas Parry through a vocabulary of death. Musing on his decision to escape from the Yellow Quarter conference and go on the run, Parry contemplates how the Civil Rearrangement's thrusting of a new life upon him effectively brought the possibilities of a different life to a close: 'I had always seen the moment when I was lifted out of bed as a birth, but actually the opposite was true [...] I had died that night, and I'd been dead ever since' (192). Later in the novel, he reaffirms this notion by proposing that in a sense he had 'been murdered' when the authorities forcefully removed him from his previous life (*DK*: 266). Parry's rebellion in the novel is fuelled by his desire to retrieve something of the past that he has lost, most immediately through returning to the Blue Quarter's Bathysphere to replicate the psychedelic experience that had revived, or contrived, a glimmer of his childhood memories. Moreover, Parry's escape is born from his desire for a different future than the one he is destined for within the Red Quarter. This desperation for a fresh start results in Parry's radical decision to join the White People, a move that he believes will mark a 'transformation', and the potential beginning of 'another life entirely' (*DK*: 281). This rebirth of sorts, however, appears paradoxical within the current socio-political framework, as Parry ultimately realises. Observing the White People passing through a Green Quarter cemetery, he – again utilising a language of death – reflects that 'one could argue that White People were dead too [...] Dead in the eyes of the authorities at least' (*DK*: 269). Denied a voice and the opportunity to belong, or 'appear' within the public sphere of post-Rearrangement Britain, the White People are prohibited from free speech and action. Joining them, as Parry ultimately realises, can only mean 'a kind of suicide', and a resignation of any hope of changing the societal inequalities and prejudices that have 'bureaucratically' killed and

erased them from society (*DK*: 281). Parry's gradual development of these unusual analogies of death and murder is a cathartic process that enables him to come to terms with the systemic violence of the Civil Rearrangement, and one that, intermittently, provides him with the hope of another 'birth' or beginning in his future. In minor moments in the novel, Parry's hope is fleetingly fulfilled. He feels happier upon his return to the Blue Quarter, where the environment is less dangerous than the Yellow Quarter and he can think again about the possibilities ahead of him, and in the Green Quarter, Parry recognises that the life he knew in the Red Quarter was 'mere scaffolding' constructed by a government seeking to veil the chaos and inequality of the rest of the nation (*DK*: 214, 275). Ultimately, he boldly affirms that 'everything would have to be remade', a remaking we might judge to have been fulfilled in Parry's solace in the idea of a life spent with Odell, and his feeling that 'a future was beginning to open out' before him (*DK*: 275, 391).

During his attempt to find and join the White People, Parry passes through a council estate in a 'poor part of town' and meets a young boy named Felix (*DK*: 292). Felix provides Parry with some tips on where he might locate the White People near his area, and Parry in turn helps Felix with the heavy bags of shopping he has procured for his mother. During their meeting, Parry remarks that Felix was 'an unusual name for a melancholic' (*DK*: 293). Parry's statement here echoes powerfully with a remark made to Parry by Mr Reek earlier in the novel at Thorpe Hall. Mr Reek assigns Parry, until then known to us as Matthew Micklewright, with his new name:

'From now on,' he said, 'your name will be Thomas Parry.' [...] 'Thomas Parry,' he said. 'A good solid name. You could be anything with a name like that. Anything at all.' [...] 'Just think of it. A completely fresh start. A new beginning.' (*DK*: 17)

Felix's aspirational, quasi-sanguine name is cruel and ironic within the impoverished surroundings of his area, and his republic more generally. Death, suicide and depression surround Felix, a bright, inquisitive and accepting boy whose name promises a future – or

even the promise of a ‘new beginning’ – that the unjust conditions around him are destined to preclude. Mr Reek’s rhetorical affirmation of Parry’s bright future of new beginnings is misleading, however it becomes clear from his lessons at Thorpe Hall that the prized ‘children of the red quarter’ are among the few who have the opportunity to travel, hold exclusive positions at the Ministry and enjoy a more comfortable life than those of the Green, Blue and Yellow Quarters (*DK*: 6). As Parry’s meeting with Felix conveys, only the children of the red quarter are legitimately entitled to conceive of an open future for themselves, an unequal, unjust predicament further underlined earlier in the novel by Parry’s realization on a walk through the Red Quarter: ‘The future tense, I thought [...] The tense that comes naturally to sanguine people’ (*DK*: 92). Equally striking is Parry’s encounter with a little girl of the Yellow Quarter, five or six years old, shortly before he attempts a risky crossing back to the Red Quarter late in the novel. Having broken in to the derelict house with Odell in order to prepare for their border crossing, Parry is taken aback at the little girl’s appearance in the run-down dwelling. She, however, is inquisitive and has little fear of Parry, having spent the early years of her life amidst the precarious, dangerous environment of the Yellow Quarter. Parry notes her ‘shiny, clean’ look at him through ‘oddly knowing’ eyes that reserve prejudice, an unsettling but welcome respite for Parry, who has been subject to scathing, suspicious treatment during his time with the White People (*DK*: 368). Amidst the dank surroundings of the derelict house Parry, perhaps symbolically, agrees to help the child remove the wings from her fairy outfit that have been causing her discomfort before she disappears upstairs, as Parry prepares to undertake the last leg of his journey. These brief encounters between Parry and the two children present the simple, striking realisation that in *Divided Kingdom*’s dystopian vision of Britain intolerance and hatred of the Other is learned, rather than a precondition of social existence, contrary to the suggestions of the narratives of each of the kingdom’s republics. Felix and the unnamed little girl stand as rare proponents of

acceptance and diversity in the novel, and represent – in *Divided Kingdom*'s predominantly pessimistic dystopian vision – faint sources of hope for a better future.

Thomson's representation of 'the Child' in *Divided Kingdom* contributes to a discernible pattern in contemporary speculative fiction, one that Sarah Dillon recognizes as 'reproductive futurism', in light of the theoretical concept developed in Lee Edelman's work *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) (Dillon 2015: 102). Dillon describes reproductive futurism as a concept that discloses the ways in which 'politics is determined by the belief that the future will give meaning to the present; a fantasy of the future most often represented by the figure of the Child' (Dillon 2015: 102). Dillon, noting both the insights and problematic elements of Edelman's theory, employs the concept in order to interpret contemporary speculative fiction's widespread preoccupation with themes of reproduction, fertility and the figure of the Child. *Divided Kingdom*'s frequent invocation of images of environmental infertility, the sterility of the political imagination and public sphere, and Parry's poignant interactions with the figure of the Child strongly suggest that the novel belongs to this wave of contemporary writing concerned with reproductive futurism.¹²⁰ Thomas Parry's two powerful encounters with warm, inclusive children in *Divided Kingdom*'s bleak and unjust vision of dystopian Britain furthermore provide a resounding critique of the twenty-first century Britain's tolerance of child poverty and the systemic inequalities that create an uneven playing field for children from low-income backgrounds or stigmatised social groups. A decade following *Divided Kingdom*'s publication, Danny Dorling outlines the subject of Thomson's critique, and highlights the enduring relevance of that critique:

The Resolution Foundation predict that in the UK, as 2015 draws to a close, 'almost 7.1 million of the nation's 13 million youngsters will be in homes with incomes judged to be less than the minimum

¹²⁰ Parry even notes that the White People are widely believed to be 'sterile' (125).

necessary for a decent standard of living'. [...] To be living on not enough has become normal for children in Britain. A growing number of those with less than that are very poor and extremely poor. British politics has become '... a system that only "sees" what it needs to perpetuate itself, and that simply doesn't include disadvantaged young people'. (Dorling: 99)

Ultimately, Thomson's novel is at its most powerful in challenging a contemporary political system that selectively 'sees' and unsees, either ignoring or perpetuating the alienation or struggle of those marginalised by the exclusionary elements of their socio-political context. Edelman's theory of reproductive futurism contests that the figure of the Child is the innocent 'in defence of whom politics must act' (Dillon 2015: 104). Echoing the arguments levelled at twenty-first century British politics by Dorling, Thomson's depiction of Felix and the female child of the Yellow Quarter provides an imaginative critique that strongly implies to the reader that Britain's contemporary political establishment has precisely ceased to act in defence of the Child, and lost its determination to secure a more liveable, prosperous present for those who are denied the same sanguine hope and optimism enjoyed by *Divided Kingdom's* children of the Red Quarter. Bringing the unseen in to the novel's field of perception in an uncanny vision of a divided, dystopian Britain, and restoring the voices to the voiceless – quite literally, in the case of the White People – *Divided Kingdom* contributes to a wave of contemporary British writing seeking to affirm values of equality, diversity and collective political appearance, not only for our own prospective futures, but for the present moment in which they are urgently required.

Concluding Remarks

Different situations demanded different narratives, and each one had its proper moment. A tale about a war would precede a war, for instance. A tale about a death would follow a funeral. But if you wanted something to happen, then you told a story in which that 'something' happened (*DK*: 366).

Thomson's self-reflexive thought towards *Divided Kingdom's* close makes a compelling case for the dystopian literary critique, and skilfully articulates its strategy as, what Tom Moylan has famously termed, a 'critical dystopia' (Moylan 2000: 183). Thomson arguably consolidates the ambitious claim made by Moylan in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (2000), that 'the contemporary moment, therefore, is one in which a critical position is necessarily dystopian' (Moylan 2000: 187). Moylan's radical claim that the dystopian aesthetic and outlook is a powerful and increasingly fundamental means of interpreting contemporary society, culture and politics, is articulated in a nuanced manner by *Divided Kingdom's* critique of the subtler anti-democratic, corrupt elements of the contemporary political establishment, in its expository depiction of the homogenising effects of a myopic, divisive identity politics on British society, and finally in its restoration of political appearance and a voice to those made abject by contemporary neoliberal governance. Thomson's affirmation of the dystopian narrative's potential, and its ability to make something 'happen' – rather than marking the nihilistic willing of a dystopian future, instead provides a comprehensive critique that assists our resistance to the 'happening' of such a future, whose subtler elements we can discern in the present moment (*DK*: 366). 'The task that lay ahead of us might have its dangers', Odell tells us, 'but they were not insurmountable [...] We had to believe in ourselves without succumbing to complacency [...] We should be confident, but not reckless' (*DK*: 366). Ultimately, then, *Divided Kingdom's* fable of a Britain ravaged by inequality, homogeneity and a truly dystopian post-political regime presents us with a means of avoiding such 'complacency' in our present, and with a means of disrupting the destructive consensus that precludes a more equal and prosperous future for Britain and its children of the future.

As Thomson's exploration of the 'politics of beginning', most effectively illustrated by the figure of the Child, contests, 'the special substance that makes each one of us unique is

finite, ethereal [...] It can be whittled away, almost without us knowing' (*DK*:: 350). The novel's Civil Rearrangement most effectively erodes this 'substance', and the subjectivity of the individual through establishing a consensus of uniformity and homogeneity within each of the four republic that now comprise the Britain of Parry's present. Diversity and equality have fallen by the wayside in the novel, leading to emphatic examples of the subtler exclusions and inequalities that Daniel Dorling has examined in contemporary Britain. Highlighting how exclusionary inequality has led to a concerning deterioration of 'the understanding and the caring of others', Dorling radically critiques contemporary Britain's 'expanding and increasingly differentiated social class suffering a new kind of poverty: the new poor, the indebted, the excluded'. (Dorling: 100). Thomson's vision of exclusion and abjection in *Divided Kingdom* does not only extend to the eerie White People who cannot be assimilated in to the 'one dimensional societies' of each republic, rather the disgust, hatred and abjectifying gaze is cast upon any citizen who exhibits diversity, which as Fernandez remarks, may 'simply be because of who you *are*' (*DK*: 195, italics mine). As this chapter's reflection on Fernandez's speech about this 'new racism' of his Britain suggests, Thomson's primary target is ultimately, as Simon Critchley insightfully describes in *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2008/2012), the unsettling phenomenon of 'populations turning inward towards some reactionary and xenophobic conception of their purported identity' (Critchley: 7). Thomson's treatment of the homogeneity and abjection that ensues from the Rearrangement's destructive politics of partition presents us with a nuanced, wide-ranging critique of contemporary dichotomies, discourses and debates surrounding immigration, inequality and exclusion in contemporary Britain. Amidst the political instability of the present moment, the novel's dystopian critical position makes a modest and powerful case for a more communitarian, democratic public and political sphere – one that, despite the insecure conditions of austerity, our ever-more fragile

economic conditions and political unions, might just keep Britain, broadly defined as the diverse, multicultural sum of its parts, intact and united.

Conclusion

‘Rancière’s Utopian Politics: Dystopia, Dissensus and the Transformation of Political Space’

In their essay ‘Utopia: A Political Ontology’ (2012), Marder and Vieira argue that ‘Dystopia is an apt instantiation of discontent without hope; it is, we might say, a utopia adapted to the age of nihilism’ (Marder and Vieira: x). Their critical assessment of a dystopian imagination that is, they claim, ‘without hope’, suggests that the nihilism they describe is a *passive*, rather than *active* nihilism. Simon Critchley, in *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2007/2012) describes a form of ‘active nihilism’ that more accurately conveys the radical nature of critique evidenced in the twenty-first century dystopias explored in this thesis. Critchley describes the active nihilist as one who, like the passive nihilist, also ‘finds everything meaningless [...] but instead of sitting back and contemplating, he tries to destroy this world and bring another in to being’ (Critchley: 6). Resembling the Rancièrian notion of the ‘political’ act, through which the regulatory framework of a police order is shown to be arbitrary, the ‘active nihilism’ of the contemporary dystopian ‘politics of dissensus’ evidences a resistance to depoliticising and exclusionary forms of consensus. Furthermore, they ‘bring another [world] in to being’, in Critchley’s terms, by the hitherto explored ‘redistribution of the sensible’ that represents the utopian possibility of Rancière’s egalitarian political philosophy. In contrast to Marder and Vieira’s argument, Caroline Edwards claims that such a utopian impulse and function is a constituent part of dystopian fiction: ‘Dystopian fiction’, she argues, ‘is not [...] anti-utopian, since the underlying political or allegorical purpose of its creation of a dystopian world achieves the utopian function of

offering the reader a radical alternative that reflects upon contemporary society' (Edwards 2009: 766). Within the broader context of twenty-first century fiction, Adisesiah and Hildyard equally underline the prevalence of the utopian impulse within dystopian fiction, arguing that 'even the dystopian sensibility that pervades much literary fiction [...] carries with it an unmitigated utopian yearning for the 'not-yet' of a better future' (Adisesiah and Hildyard: 3).

As the central chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, the politically-engaged dystopian critiques of Maggie Gee's *The Flood*, Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*, J.G. Ballard's *Kingdom Come* and Rupert Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* are meaningfully engaged with the 'activity' of dissensus that is so fundamental to Jacques Rancière's philosophy of equality. Fulfilling Rancière's conception of the egalitarian, socio-politically transformative activities of dissensus, the dystopian interrogations of the novels consistently cut 'across forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres' within their contemporary moment (Rancière 2010/2013: 2). Moreover, they frequently work to 'introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception' in their illustration of the resistance and political appearance of those rendered unequal and excluded by the radically negative police orders that govern their socio-political spaces (Rancière 2010/2013: 2). The 'politics of dissensus' evidenced in the fictions of these contemporary authors, as my location of the novels within their socio-political contexts has endeavoured to illustrate, is one that is particularly meaningful in addressing twenty-first century dystopian critiques of the neoliberal economic consensus and its role in maintaining social inequalities and exclusions. While neoliberalism is seldom the primary focus of Rancière's theoretical investigations, his thought nonetheless, as Samuel Chambers claims, establishes that neoliberal consensus politics 'forms and founds a particular police order' and articulates 'a particular arrangement between any given police order and the potentially

disruptive force of democratic politics' (Chambers: 25). With the context of Britain's neoliberal present in mind, I have argued that the novels interrogate the destructive forms of socio-economic and political consensus that present threats to existing possibilities for a more democratic, inclusive and sustainable future. A number of key examples are to be found in this respect: in the forms of consensus undermined by Maggie Gee's environmental politics in *The Flood*; in Rupert Thomson's visions of destructive forms of nationalism in *Divided Kingdom*; in Sarah Hall's nuanced critiques of the socio-economic and political consensus that 'There is No Alternative' in *The Carhullan Army*; and, finally, in Ballard's criticisms of the political consensus of New Labour's 'new politics' and complicity in a dangerous contemporary vacuum in *Kingdom Come*.

In his chapter 'Rancière's Utopian Politics', Paul Patton argues that when Rancièrian moments of the 'political' occur, 'equality is always expressed in collective action on the part of those excluded or discriminated against' (Patton 2012: 131). The key dystopian fictions explored in the thesis, in line with Rancièrian thought, express equality in collective action on the part of a number of societal groups who are excluded or rendered unequal by the police order that governs their political space. As evidenced in Chapter One, Maggie Gee's *The Flood* is as centrally concerned with societal inequality as it is with the radically declining state of the environment – alongside the novel's images of the iridescent lights and wealth of the extravagant Gala, Gee depicts the left behind communities living in poverty within the Towers. These excluded citizens are, however, seen to reclaim political appearance within the microtopian 'space of appearance' at Kew Gardens following the apocalyptic destruction of the deeply divided dystopian society that preceded it. Chapter Two presents analysis of Sarah Hall's literary vision of the police order that subjugates and excludes female subjects within a dystopian Britain. Rather than sliding to the passive 'nihilism' that Marder and Vieira ascribe to the dystopian imagination, however, *The Carhullan Army* instead presents

moments of resistance, transgression and a nuanced, critical utopian vision that at once demonstrates the pitfalls of Utopia and simultaneously intimates the alternative possibilities of a politics of sustainability and gender equality. In *Kingdom Come*, the critical interventions of the Ballardian imagination reflect Gregory Claeys's point that dystopias 'need not furnish a happy ending' to both 'warn us against and educate us about' the dystopian potential evident in the present moment (Claeys 2017: 501). *Kingdom Come* illustrates a pessimistic, but no less committed, critique of the inequality and exclusions of contemporary Britain. These exclusions are at once partly responsible for the vulnerability and unrest of the depoliticised citizens who, as a result, participate in the violent or consumerist crowds. Concurrently, the disenfranchised individuals who are demonstrably engaged with violent, symbolic expressions of a rejection of the police order of a 'heritage' Britain ultimately become complicit in a new consensual order in which minorities are subject to intimidation and a violent social exclusion. *Divided Kingdom*'s illustration of equality is, as Chapter Four's close reading describes, on the part of the White People whose abjection at the hands of an exclusionary police order and identity politics is shown to deny them the same political appearance that citizens of the prosperous Red Quarter enjoy. As Parry's odyssey through the Blue, Green and Yellow quarters reveals to him, the nation that was once the United Kingdom is now divided, both by partitions and grossly unequal living conditions. Within these politically-engaged literary depictions, the 'politics of beginning' I trace within *Divided Kingdom* presents both resistance to the socio-political consensus and a means of imagining alternatives and 'beginning anew', in the form that Hannah Arendt judges to be fundamental to the human condition (Arendt 1958/1998: 9).

Within the imagined political spaces of their dystopian visions, these contemporary novelists illustrate moments where the police order and prevailing forms of destructive consensus within society are subject to egalitarian dissensual interventions that intimate a

modest utopian impulse for societal transformation. Rancièrian thought provides a theoretical framework through which to understand, challenge and undermine the ‘order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise’ (Rancière 1995/1999: 29). In the textual examples cited in this concluding section, the dystopian novels of Gee, Hall, Ballard and Thomson challenge the destructive forms of the police order by which the ‘discourse’ of the unequal or excluded is relegated to the status of ‘noise’, and present oppositional possibilities through which those who are denied political appearance can ‘appear’ and participate as equal democratic subjects, and where the systemic injustices or forms of consensus – by which their voice has been reduced to ‘noise’ and voicelessness – can be transformed. These ‘activities’ of dissensus within dystopian fictions thus not only evidence literary ‘responses’ to the social and political contexts in which the novels were produced – nor do they sound a mere conservative ‘warning’ of future perils. Instead, they both fulfil the political potential that Moylan identifies within late twentieth century ‘critical dystopias’ and, as my analysis has demonstrated, in their engagement with ‘activities’ of dissensus are incisively attuned to a contemporary political moment in which, in Moylan’s terms, the ‘cold flame of critique’ is urgently required.

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