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POPULAR VIOLENCE IN J.G. BALLARD'S COCAINE NIGHTS AND SUPER-CANNES

Abstract

Popular culture in the contemporary sense of the term is closely connected with consumerism. According to John Fiske, popular culture is a culture contradictory in itself. In his set of dystopian visions of a Europe set in the near and, as it appears, unavoidable future – *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* – J.G. Ballard presented two capitalist utopias. Like most critical utopias, these novels contain some dystopian elements, and this paper attempts to portray the novels as a presentation of a world where money and progress are the two undisputed authorities. After a separate analysis of both settings, the conclusion is reached that in these two novels the popular culture is the culture of violence used to fight the established system.

Key words: popular culture, popular violence, consumerism

1. All is not well in dreamland – Introduction

*It's a love story for the new age, for the sixth page
We're on a quick, sick rampage – wining and dining, drinking and driving
Excessive buying overdose and dying
On our drugs and our love and our dreams and our rage
(Lana Del Rey, "National Anthem")*

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J.G. Ballard is notorious for his dystopian visions of the future. His depictions of the world of tomorrow are predominantly grey, full of random violence, with characters who are selfish, introvert, perverted, but also rich and powerful. Two novels of his that present such a world have been selected for analysis in this paper – *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes*. These novels are naturally discussed together, due to the similarity in their contents and narrative. Both present modern-day capitalist utopias and both provide images of a world many people would gladly choose to live in. At the same time, both stories articulate a dire warning that humanity is heading towards utter degradation and the twilight of civilization and life as we know it.

At first glance, these two novels are critical utopias, and might be discussed as such. On the other hand, they could also be treated as dystopias due to their bleak visions of the future; like most critical utopias, they contain dystopian elements. While all these approaches would present an interesting direction for analysis, a different path has been chosen here, one that becomes quite apparent when one glances merely at the title pages of these two books. The immediate association one has upon looking at them is the novels' connection with popular culture and consumer culture. The first title, *Cocaine Nights*, combines two words with the immediate connotation of a "good time" – *cocaine* – the expensive and notorious pleasure booster, and *night* – the time of day when pleasurable or illicit acts take place. If we only heard this title read out loud, it could also sound like Cockaigne nights, which would also be a suitable title for this story due to the commercial paradise and carefree lifestyle it portrays. The second title, *Super-Cannes*, echoes the glamour of the Côte d'Azur, with its famous beaches, celebrities and cultural events, combined with the emphatic notion of *super*. This geographical name has its equivalent in real-life French geography, as the author informs us at the beginning of the novel, but this would make no difference with regards to the first association.

Popular culture, as John Fiske defines it, is contradictory in itself (2010: 4). It belongs to the "masses" and fights the "system" at the same time. Popular culture belongs to the oppressed and the underprivileged. Popular culture is "a site of struggle" (Fiske 2010: 17-18) and should be clearly differentiated from what is considered to be "valuable" and "art" in the world of those who define these categories and distance themselves from them. In his book titled *The Practice of Everyday Life* Michel de Certeau states that "people have

to make do with what they have” (De Certeau 1998: 18). Those who do not belong to a minority elite and who are not well-off have to find ways to incorporate in their popular culture things that are available and relevant to them, and things to which they assign a meaning. “To be made into popular culture, a commodity must also bear the interests of the people (Fiske 2010: 19).” The popular commodities then often come to represent an instrument of fight against the imposed order.

This fight is always silent, almost hidden, and it provides an immeasurable level of satisfaction to the parties concerned. In such situations, it is of vital importance never to give up, and fighting against the system by means of popular culture provides a perpetual battlefield and limitless means. It is very important, in all social struggles, to have “not only a sense of *with whom*, but also of *against whom*” (Fiske 2010: 20). In the context of the underprivileged and the oppressed, the system/established order of affairs is the *whom* they are always fighting against. According to Fiske, “without the textual reproduction of the power that is being struggled against, there can be no relevance” (2010: 21).

The two isolated societies portrayed in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* cannot be by any means thought of as belonging to the oppressed and the underprivileged. On the contrary, the two communities presented in the novels are financially taken care of and boast freedom and a state-of-the-art system of regulations which they believe is the right path to a happy future. Their inhabitants live without a care in the world, and at first sight everything seems to be functioning perfectly. Yet, as the stories progress, it comes to one’s attention that behind the carefree existence and perfect surface there is a dark authoritarian regime where money and work are the only gods. While in real life it is usually the poor and the underprivileged who feel oppressed, in these novels the author describes a situation where the rich feel that they are oppressed by the perfect state of affairs and that there is no way out of the imposed system which offers them nothing but boredom and a slow death of the psyche. The system draws them in like a vacuum and they are trapped and cannot escape.

If we were, then to talk about the popular culture in these communities, boredom and death of the mind would be the authoritative forces that make the residents of Estrella de Mar and Eden-Olympia underprivileged and oppressed. The world of the popular “struggle” is turned upside down in this context. It is not the poor who have to fight, but the carefree and rich. But let us first take a look at the story lines of these two novels.

Cocaine Nights is the story of a wealthy retirement community situated on the coast of Spain, in an artificially built leisure spot for the rich, conveniently named Estrella de Mar. The story opens with Charles Prentice, a writer and world traveller, whose profession is “crossing frontiers” (Ballard 1996: 9). Charles arrives in Estrella de Mar to investigate the circumstances under which his brother Frank was incarcerated after confessing to arson and murder. We find out that a terrible tragedy took place in this idyllic setting – fire was set to the Hollinger mansion, and five people were killed. At the beginning of the story, it appears to the reader that there might be a simple explanation for the deaths, and that all it takes to resolve the mystery is finding the madman/madmen who committed this crime. As the story unfolds, however, it turns out that nothing is as simple as it seems. We find out that the entire community of Estrella de Mar is drawn into a web of crime and sexual perversity, and that this is an accepted and praised manner of survival. The story’s ending gives us the impression that Charles too has been caught in this intricate web, which further proves the strength of the proposed system.

Super-Cannes tells a similar story, which is why it is mentioned earlier in the paper that these two novels are naturally analyzed together. The plot is set in France, on the Côte d’Azur, in, again, an artificially created corporate community, a business park called Eden-Olympia. The setting is quite idyllic, overlooking Cannes and the magical world of the Croisette. The local workforce is so immersed in its work that they have forgotten how to relax and they have no imagination. The main protagonist is a former RAF pilot Paul Sinclair, who arrives from England to live in Eden-Olympia because his young wife Jane has been offered a job at the local medical centre, having been invited to replace a former colleague, Dr David Greenwood, who apparently lost his mind one morning and went on a shooting spree killing ten people for no apparent reason. Again, as in *Cocaine Nights*, at first it seems that Dr Greenwood might have been framed, and that some aspects of the crime might have been hidden by the local police, but all this remains in the background when Paul starts to find out about the secret, dark world of violence and perversity which underlies the calm surface of the corporate community. The story’s ending again presents the main protagonist walking in the footsteps of the man whose dark fate he investigated, which once again proves the strength of such a proposed system.

Aside from the obvious differences – Spain and France, a community of retired people and a business park, a fire and a shooting spree – the two novels have a lot in common. They both portray a frightening possibility of what the capitalist world might become in the near future. The people living in the two communities literally have everything – they lack no means, and live in spacious villas and beautiful surroundings. While the retired find pleasure in their rest and relaxation, those working find pleasure in constant work. The underlying threats in both these communities are, as it has already been mentioned, boredom and death of the senses and the mind. Self-declared well-wishers in these communities come up with a bizarre way of dealing with these threats – committing acts of random violence. Involvement in crimes and sexual perversity are ways of “staying alive”. The consumer heaven in which these people live, turns into hell for a few hours daily, just to keep everyone awake and alert.

Such a vision of the future is alarming in more ways than one. In the described circumstances, the ‘old ways’ are forgotten and the revolutionary development leads towards an irreversible path of destruction. As James Fitchett put it:

Ballard is implying that capitalism and the long term survival and growth of markets will come to rely on *measured* and *managed* violence, perversity, and psychopathy. His post modern argument is in some senses a total rejection of the moral concerns popular in the early twentieth-century (2002: 314).

In Ballard’s world, there is no indication that anyone reminisces about the ‘good old days’, the only thing that matters is the present and the future, however dark they may be. Violence and perversion win hands down. There is no voice of reason, those who are not participating are mere spectators. By examining these forms of capitalism and consumerism that lead to violence, one is naturally led to conclude that in these novels popular culture turns into popular violence.

It has already been mentioned that in everyday life people have to make do with what they have (De Certeau 1998: 18). Faced with the threat of a certain death of the soul, the consumers of the future who are presented in these novels find an alternative manner of entertaining themselves and opposing the system. Further on, since “popular culture is made by the people” (Fiske 2010: 10) relevant is what they themselves choose to be so. Ballard has provided us with a dark and frightening idea

that, under the right circumstances, violence can be relevant, and become relevant. Paradoxically, in these two novels, morally unacceptable violence becomes a popular and widely accepted form of resistance.

In this sense the two stories can at first sight appear to be two detective novels, and both have been defined as such – “*Cocaine Nights* comes at you like a conventional ‘all-is-not-as-it-seems’ whodunit. But all is not as it seems (Bright 1997)” and “...in *Super-Cannes*...we might identify the author of ...the detective novel, the tender travelogue and the supremely subtle parody (Clark 2000)”. Nevertheless, the mystery aspect remains weak in comparison with the other impressions one is left with after having read the novels through. In the text that follows we will try to present the process through which in these two novels popular culture turns into popular violence.

2. Burning in the flames – popular violence in *Cocaine Nights*

*Come and take a walk on the wild side,
let me kiss you hard in the pouring rain
You like your girls insane
Choose your last words, this is the last time
Cause you and I, we were born to die
(Lana Del Rey, “Born to Die”)*

“And then what? asks Ballard. What happens when the boredom sets in? What do you do when the good life starts to look like a living death (Bright, Internet)?” At the very beginning of the novel, the main protagonist, Charles Prentice ponders over how dull modern living has become – people constantly travel, without having the sense of where they are heading: “We arrive at an airport identical to the one we left, with the same car-rental agencies and hotel rooms with their adult movie channels and deodorized bathroom, side-chapels of that lay religion, mass tourism (Ballard 1996: 10).”

When he talks to his brother Frank, this idea about travelling and getting nowhere is further developed. When Frank asks him whether he actually arrives anywhere with all that endless travelling, Charles replies: “It’s hard to tell – sometimes I think I’ve made jet-lag into a new philosophy. It’s the nearest we can get to penitence (Ballard 1996: 25).”

On the other hand, one can conclude that perhaps some people prefer to live life this way, isolated from the world, and free to do as they please and not be judged by anyone. When Frank talks about Estrella de Mar, he tells Charles: "It doesn't really exist. That's why I like the coast. I've been looking for it all my life. Estrella de Mar isn't anywhere (Ballard 1996: 17)."

The introduction of these ideas serves one sole purpose – and that is to show how in this world of the future human existence has become limited, and how certain ideas are presented as the only ones possible. As it has been mentioned before, it is in such systems that systematic revolt surfaces, and there is emergence of a constant struggle.

The notion of the two resorts described in this novel is developed gradually; at first it seems that these places are a dream come true. "However modestly, a happier twentieth century had rediscovered itself in this corner of the Costa del Sol (Ballard 1996: 66)."

However, the dreams and promises of a happier future are quickly cast aside when the main protagonist starts to find out about a deviant underworld of crime which exists parallel to the shiny surface world: "Money, sex, drugs. What else is there these days? Outside Estrella de Mar no one gives a damn about the arts. The only real philosophers left are the police (Ballard 1996: 117)." At one point in the novel, Dr Sanger actually compares the real Estrella de Mar to the underworld (Ballard 1996: 174). The three pillars of regime are drugs, gambling and illicit sex. And although lawyers, musicians, advertising and television executives, management consultants and local government officers live at the Residencia Costasol, it is described as "the netherworld" (Ballard 1996: 284).

At certain points, it seems almost as if there is an explanation for such behaviour – the prospects of happiness are marred by the existence of an invisible but impending threat – that of boredom and a death of the brain: "Here on the Costa del Sol nothing would ever happen again, and the people of the pueblos were already the ghosts of themselves (Ballard 1996: 75)." The residents of the Costasol complex are on the right side of fifty, they are retired, they cashed in their share options or sold their partnerships and made the most of a golden handshake (Ballard 1996: 218). Everything points to the necessity of them being quite happy, but Charles notices that: "The Costa del Sol is the longest afternoon in the world, and they've decided to sleep through it (Ballard 1996: 218)." Furthermore, the residents seem to be resolved about their fate: "The people of the Residencia had not only

travelled to the far side of boredom but had decided that they liked the view (Ballard 1996: 239).”

It seems that if nothing is done, the consequences could be devastating. The offered alternative does not seem less scary, but nevertheless, it is a revolt of the people. They praise violence as they would praise a celebrity – they cannot live without hearing about it, seeing it, taking part in its existence and development. Ballard reaches out for biblical motives to describe the severity of the state of affairs: “...what else is there to do in paradise? You catch the psychoactive fruit that falls from the tree. Believe me, everyone here is trying to lie down with the serpent (1996: 89-90).”

What adds to the surface glamour of this bizarre picture are the numerous brand names which Ballard artfully introduces in the right places. It is difficult not to like a place that resembles the Sixteenth Arrondissement, Holland Park, the Left Bank, Bel Air, Chelsea, Greenwich Village of the 1960s, a place where people wear Rolexes, listen to Vivaldi and Mozart, sit on Eames chairs and read *The New Yorker*, *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Herald Tribune*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*.

Certain expensive brands of cars have their special place in the story, so no one simply drives, enters or leaves one's car, Ballard is always very specific: for the poorer folk – the visitors and the different agents or employees of various institutions, there is the Chevrolet, the Renault, the Citroën, the Seat, the Saab, and for the richer ones the sky is the limit, as they say – the novel's car park has a wide diversity of automobile industry jewels: an Aston Martin, a Bentley, a Jaguar, a Porsche, a Mercedes, a BMW. The Range Rover, with its outdoor style, always adds to an atmosphere of action. For car lovers, the entire book resembles a car catalogue, and, for the connoisseur, each of the cars tells us different things about a certain character. The role and purpose of cars in the text could be an interesting topic for further study.

The colourful array of characters in the novel has the vividness of a Shakespearean plot: in addition to Charles, who, until the very end, is a mere spectator of events, in spite of being the main protagonist, and his brother Frank, who is incarcerated in Marbella and facing a thirty-year sentence, it is these life-like and deeply corrupted characters that give us the impression that *Cocaine Nights'* scary scenario could really happen in a world not so far removed from our own. To mention only some – there is Bobby Crawford, a psychopath or a saint, a new kind of Messiah, the Imam of the marina, the Zoroaster of the beach umbrella, an abused child who

grew up to become a man who believes that psychiatrists tried to steal his soul. He is an obvious example of modern-day obsessions and delusions people are facing. Then there is Elizabeth Shand, the evil mastermind behind the deadly scams, but there are also the victims of the great fire in the Hollinger mansion: Anne Hollinger, the wannabe actress, the former drug addict, the raped bride from the home video, Alice Hollinger, the former film producer's wife, a former actress who burned to death in bed with her male secretary, Roger Sansom, who was holding her shoes at the moment of death (shoes again being an obvious symbol of popular culture and fetishes) and the pregnant Swedish maid Bibi Jansen who died in the fire, in the bathtub, side to side by the host, the ex film producer and Alice's husband, Mr Hollinger (a couple that obviously represents the modern-day decomposing of the family union).

These people are the originators and builders of the uniquely corrupt and violent world of Spanish resorts. Some are the victims, some are the culprits, but they are all oppressed by the surroundings they live in. In Ballard's words, such places are intimations of the future: "Leisure societies lie ahead of us, like those you see on this coast. People will still work – or, rather, some people will work, but only for a decade of their lives. They will retire in their late thirties, with fifty years of idleness in front of them (1996: 180)." Ballard's scenario could be an epilogue of the state of affairs that exists in the world today, because, whether we are aware of it or not, everything in modern-day societies has changed. In his own words: "Everything comes sooner these days. The future rushes towards us like a tennis player charging the net. People in the new professions peak in their late thirties (Ballard 1996: 176)."

In this novel the people are powerless to stop these changes, even those who are not entirely resolved about their fate. They *have to* forget who they are and where they came from in order to come to terms with the imminent threat of living death. The main advertiser of the new system, Bobby Crawford, tells Charles that "on this coast the past isn't allowed to exist" (Ballard 1996: 207). At the Residencia Costasol, according to him, the residents are "waiting for a new kind of light" (Ballard 1996: 213), they are "refugees from time, [...] living in the *'fourth world'*" (Ballard 1996: 216). Charles observes that Residencia Costasol is: "...an accident. This is where the late twentieth century ran into the buffers (Ballard 1996: 235)."

The wake-up call intended to be a form of resistance is promoted and organised by Bobby Crawford. It consists of random violence and

trespassing into the formerly forbidden. As Dr Sanger mildly puts it, "Crawford likes to keep the pot stirred, but sometimes he goes too far" (Ballard 1996: 173). The overall promotion of violence includes collective partaking in burglaries, rapes, break-ins and petty crimes with the sole purpose of causing anxiety. Everyone seems to be in on the conspiracy, and everyone finds the anxiety exhilarating, freeing, and empowering. David Hennessy notices how it is, "curious how a few robberies can be a boost to business. People get nervous, you know, and start shifting their cash around" (Ballard 1996: 229). It seems that Crawford discovered "an elixir that would wake the world" (Ballard 1996: 327).

Crawford, as the main force behind the resistance, has developed an entire theory: "Crime has a respectable history – Shakespeare's London, Medici Florence. Warrens of murder, poisons and garroting. Name me a time when civic pride and the arts both flourished and there wasn't extensive crime (Ballard 1996: 261)." When Charles argues that the Acropolis certainly wasn't crawling with pimps and pickpockets, Crawford reiterates that the Greeks had slavery and pederasty (Ballard 1996: 261).

At first, it is hard for Charles to believe that Bobby Crawford's policy induced all the changes, he believes that they might be "a response to something no more radical than simple boredom" (Ballard 1996: 254). But, since the resorts are not ordinary, ordinary rules do not apply. The complex is "a private kingdom with its own currencies of mind and meaning" (Ballard 1996: 276).

The acknowledgement of violence and the statement about the response to boredom is clear evidence that Charles accepts that ordinary people are capable of such unimaginable deeds. Soon, he starts to realise "the point": "Crime and creativity go together, and always have done. The greater the sense of crime, the greater the civic awareness and richer the civilization. Nothing else binds a community together. It's a strange paradox (Ballard 1996: 281)."

As it has already been mentioned, in the end Charles is captured into the alluring net of widely accepted and popular violence for which everyone takes the blame. He is aware that everyone has to live with their guilt but is also aware that there is nothing to be done to escape it. And although towards the end of the novel Charles realizes that, with regards to the Hollinger fire: "A bonfire of private sub-poenas had taken place among its charred timbers, a tinder-blaze of those warrants we issue against ourselves, now never to be served and left to gather dust in their closed

files (Ballard 1996: 276).” At one earlier point in the text Ballard may have implied that some sort of otherworldly justice will come to all the victims; the burning sun on the Spanish coast is “a premonition of the last carnival blaze that would one day consume Estrella de Mar” (1996: 160).

3. Kill me, thrill me – Popular violence in *Super Cannes*

*Everything I want, I have – money, notoriety and rivieras
I even think I found God in the flashbulbs of your pretty cameras
Pretty cameras, pretty cameras
Am I glamorous? Tell me, am I glamorous?
(Lana Del Rey, “Without You”)*

Super-Cannes tells the story of a European version of the silicon valley. In his novel Ballard created a magnificent corporate world of the future. Again, in Fitchett’s words:

Eden-Olympia is Ballard’s representation of a capitalist utopia that exists according to the principles of the stock market, global capital flow, private enterprise and the knowledge economy. It is a physical metaphor for the ideals and aspirations of global capitalism and a manifestation of Western Europe’s collective psychology of affluence, or more precisely, about the psychology of the individual who attains the ultimate objective of global capitalist culture: total fulfillment in work and play, power beyond the authority of the state, and absolute ‘freedom’ (2002: 311).

At the very beginning, the author informs us that among the romantic surroundings of the French Riviera: “Lured by tax concessions and a climate like northern California’s, dozens of multinational companies had moved into the business park that now employed over ten thousand people (Ballard 2000: 5).” The tenants of the business park are large international companies: Mitsui, Siemens, Unilever, Sumitomo, French giants such as Elf-Aquitane, Carrefour, Rhône-Poulenc, along with smaller companies, investment brokers, bioengineering outfits, design consultancies. Ballard also mentions IBM Europe, Nippon Telegraph, Nissan, Chemical Bank, Honeywell, Dupont, Shell, Monsanto, Toyota. In his own words, Eden-

Olympia is an “ideas laboratory for the new millennium” (Ballard 2000: 16).

The story opens with a British couple, Paul and Jane Sinclair, arriving from Maida Vale because Jane has been offered a job in the local medical centre. Aside from the obvious financial reasons for the move, we find out that Paul’s knee had been injured in a flying accident nine months before and he believes the Mediterranean environment will do him some good. We learn that his cousin Charles is taking care of the publishing house he runs and the editing of the two aviation magazines while he is away.

As in *Cocaine Nights*, in the beginning, when the Sinclairs arrive, everything seems perfect. The only thing that mars their happiness is the fact that Jane is replacing her former colleague and friend who lost his mind one morning and killed ten people – seven senior executives and three hostages. At the moment of their arrival, David Greenwood’s ghost is “hovering above the artificial lakes and forests like the ghosts of Princip over Sarajevo and Lee Harvey Oswald over Dallas” (Ballard 2000: 9). The Sinclairs arrive to the business park only four months after the Greenwood killings, and all the memories are still fresh.

Although Jane thinks that Eden-Olympia is “disgustingly rich” (Ballard 2000: 28), she immediately tries and succeeds to fit into the “all work no play” programme. We find out details about the business park, which is a community of the future, with very strict rules: “Freedom was the right to paid work, while leisure was the mark of the shiftless and untalented (Ballard 2000: 46).” In contrast to that famous saying that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, Ballard tells us that “Eden-Olympia demanded a special type of temperament, committed to work rather than to pleasure, to the balance sheet and the drawing board rather than to the brothels and gaming tables of the Old Riviera” (2000: 81-82) and that “at Eden-Olympia work is the ultimate play, and play the ultimate work” (2000: 94). Here one can witness a distinct shift between what is usually meant under ‘work’ and ‘play’.

This sort of system causes isolation and slowly but steadily Ballard starts to describe the true atmosphere, the undercurrent of the glamorous surface: “The glass and gun-metal office blocks were set well apart from each other, separated by artificial lakes and forested traffic islands where a latter-day Crusoe could have found comfortable refuge (2000: 7-8).” Intimate companionship and neighbourly relations have no place in Eden-Olympia: “The top-drawer professionals no longer needed to devote a

moment's thought to each other, and had dispensed with the checks and balances of community life (Ballard 2000: 38)." Again, there is mention of airports which take people to places but do not represent familiar ground: "People find all the togetherness they need in the airport boarding lounge and the department-store lift (Ballard 2000: 263)." There is also that distinct sense of non-belonging, which is evident when Paul tells us: "I knew we were very happy, but at the same time I felt that we were extras in a tourist film (Ballard 2000: 40)."

It is very obvious from the very beginning that this new Riviera has nothing to do with the old Riviera everyone knows and loves: "Picasso and Matisse have gone, and the business parks have taken their place (Ballard 2000: 103)." Ballard scatters details about the past, but for the reader this only induces a feeling of nostalgia for the "good old days", for in the story they are nowhere to be found. He mentions Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald drinking their whisky sours at the Château of La Garoupe, Graham Greene, Rita Hayworth, Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford.

While Jane is working for this new system, Paul is left with a lot of time on his hands, which he spends exploring. He is especially intrigued by the Greenwood story because, firstly, he keeps wondering whether David and Jane were lovers and, secondly, he is very uncomfortable because he and his wife have settled in David Greenwood's former home. As Paul starts investigating, as in *Estrella de Mar*, a dark world of crime and corruption erupts from a peaceful surface of a dormant community of the rich. At first, everything seems almost too calm: "Over the immaculate gardens hung the air of well-bred catatonia that only money can buy (Ballard 2000: 20)." However, the reader soon finds out that nothing is what it seems as "over the swimming pools and manicured lawns seemed to hover a dream of violence" (Ballard 2000: 75). A little later, Ballard almost playfully informs us, that, "there's some very rough touch rugby being played at Eden-Olympia" (2000: 81). Slowly, Paul starts to find out about an underworld of violence, and, as in *Cocaine Nights*, this violence is widely accepted, this time in the form of collective or group therapy. Paul finds out about the "ratissages" of self-help groups, a dark world of child pornography, fascist ideas, stolen jewellery, prostitution, armed robberies, murders, drive-by killings, drug-dealing, racist attacks, paedophile sex.

As in *Cocaine Nights*, once again the colourful array of protagonists makes the entire concept more believable. In the world of *Super-Cannes* the reader is introduced to:

- a) Paul Sinclair, the former RAF pilot who is undecided about his attraction to thirteen-year-olds and who is hoping to one day “fly again”.
- b) Dr Jane Sinclair, the twenty-eight-year-old bisexual heroin addict who gladly becomes part of the violent system of Eden-Olympia.
- c) Wilder Penrose, the insane psychiatrist who sees himself as the new messiah, an angry son who is troubled by the loss of his father and bad at anger management.
- d) Pascal Zander, the thuggish, bisexual and corrupt police chief who uses a strong aftershave and attacks women sexually for fun.
- e) Frank Halder, by his own admission, the person who killed Greenwood although he was the only person he truly loved in Eden-Olympia.
- f) Frances Baring aka Delmas, the seemingly shy blonde who is the organiser behind most violent games.
- g) Alain and Simone Delage, the sexually perverted couple who climb the violence ladder most quickly of all.
- h) Don Meldrum, the Australian manager of Riviera News, a Fleet Street veteran with a drinker’s puffy face disguised by a tennis tan, a man who appears at street corners out of nowhere and who may have an even bigger role in the “games” than it seems at the beginning
- i) David Greenwood, the English doctor who starts to hate himself for what he has become, and decides that the price should be paid in blood.

The seven executives who were killed were also part of the criminal organisation of Eden-Olympia, as Paul finds out. In contrast to *Cocaine Nights*, where there is collective guilt for the fire even though one man lit the flame, in *Super-Cannes* David Greenwood is the one who single-handedly killed seven people, and was framed for killing a further three. Moreover, unlike Bobby Crawford who is the instigator of the collective rebellion and holds the main role in enforcing all the violence, in *Super-Cannes* one visionary and mastermind is behind the *idea* of collective therapy through violence.

What Ballard started in *Cocaine Nights* is further developed in *Super-Cannes*: the idea that only through engagement in violence can man

overcome his terrifying destiny of eternal boredom. Just like Estrella de Mar, Eden-Olympia slowly drew its residents into a web of living death. The residents worked on Sundays, they could not bear to be on holiday, they did not even have sex – according to Ballard, using biblical imagery once again, it was “an Eden without a snake” (2000: 258). They also started suffering from insomnia and depression, and when they did manage to sleep they started having dreams about violence and revenge, and Wilder Penrose came up with an idea of how to save them. He believes that the suppression of violence in modern society is not completely natural, because violence exists in the mind of every human being.

According to Penrose, this world of recreational crime and raiding parties is totally acceptable because, as he explains to Paul: “The people at Eden-Olympia aren’t mad. Their problem is that they’re too sane (Ballard 2000: 248)...” Penrose talks about a controlled and supervised madness, stating that: “Psychopathy is its own most potent cure, and has been throughout history. At times it grips entire nations in a vast therapeutic spasm. No drug has ever been more potent (Ballard 2000: 251).” Further on, he practically claims that people have to get a little crazy in order not to go crazy: “The cure sounds drastic, but the malaise is far more crippling. An inability to rest the mind, to find time for reflection and recreation. Small doses of insanity are the only solution. Their own psychopathy is all that can rescue these people (Ballard 2000: 251).” Thus, according to Ballard, violence in small doses is the best way to “to tone up the system” (2000: 171).

Penrose firmly believes that Eden-Olympia is strong enough to allow perverse behaviour, and that there is nothing wrong with his theory. He is certain that the violence is justified, he talks about “Bandaged fists and plastered shins on Monday mornings, but clear, confident heads” further defending his cause by stating that, “the immigrant population gains from the clearer heads of the people who do the hiring”, and that, “...the violence against the local prostitutes was a special kind of rehabilitation, a form of shock treatment that would send them back to their factory jobs” (Ballard 2000: 260-261).

The world of Eden-Olympia, as the world of Estrella de Mar, is an alluring place, made even more appealing by Ballard’s use of well-known brands which indicate a world of art, comfort and carefree existence. He mentions such novels as *Tender is the Night*, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass*, such magazines as *Paris Match*,

Le Monde, *Nice-Matin*, *Herald Tribune*, *Der Spiegel*, *Vogue*, such hotels and facilities as The Majestic, the Carlton, and the Martinez, the Palm Beach Casino and the Noga Hilton. To these one might add the brand names that carry the connotation of luxury and a good time: Chanel Number 5, Maxim's, Tiffany's, or the Tom Collins cocktails.

The car-park is again described at its best, including once again the more expensive Jaguar, Mercedes, BMW, Porsche, Bentley, the less expensive Renault, Citroën, Saab, the adventure-seeking Range Rover, with an addition of the Cadillac, the Audi, the Opel Diplomat, the Buick, the Land-Cruiser, the Volvo. The brand name Jaguar alone is mentioned about sixty times in the novel. Such a fact reveals what a large role cars have in depicting an overall image of wealth.

In *Super-Cannes* once again we have the idea that the past does not exist: "Everything five minutes old is waiting for the clearance sale (Ballard 2000: 224)." However, Ballard is very clear about what kind of consumer future awaits the people living in such conditions: "It sounds like a ticket to 1984, this time by the scenic route (2000: 95)." Once again he seems to believe that, like with *Estrella de Mar*, some form of higher justice will intervene when the time comes: "Layers of dust and humidity formed strata in the soft air, through which the hotels of the Croisette trembled like uneasy spectres, a dream about to collapse into itself (Ballard 2000: 148)."

The ending of the novel provides us with a bleak vision of the future; Paul is continuing in David's steps, and the "old world" seems to be lost forever amid the new images of sun and death: "The beaches beside the coastal road were littered with forgotten film magazines and empty bottles of suntan cream, the debris of a dream washed ashore among the driftwood (Ballard 2000: 324)."

4. Consuming psychopathy – Conclusion

*And I'm off to the races, cases of Bacardi chasers
Chasin' me all over town 'cause he knows I'm wasted
Facin' time again on Rikers Island and I won't get out
Because I'm crazy baby, I need you to come here and save me
(Lana Del Ray, "Off to the Races")*

Popular culture breeds consumer culture, and the popularity of certain brands can do more to boost sales than the simple quality of a product. In the world of popular and consumer culture, the quality is not taken into consideration, only the “desire-inducing marketing symbols count” (Arnould 2005: 869). In the two analysed novels, the same applies to violence. The value of and justification for the violence are not questioned. What starts off as a form of struggle ends up as a popular trend of mass consumption (a mass occurrence in the novels’ limited surroundings).

Ballard dedicated much of his career to examining the possibilities of where the current rate of human development might lead us. The topics introduced in *Cocaine Nights* culminate in *Super-Cannes*:

Super-Cannes is in many ways a millennial synthesis of the surreal Ballardian landscape. The author’s lifelong fascinations are all present in this novel. Alienation. Aerial flight as the ultimate dreamlike escape. Messianic megalomaniacal voyeurs substituting foreplay and sex for psychobabble and manipulation. The violent collision of consumer technology and the human body. Psychotherapy as assault and/or recreation. Planned utopias that end up unwittingly amplifying the very elements from which they purport to offer asylum (*Lalumière* 2001).

As opposed to simply following a psychiatrist’s advice (in this case that of Wilder Penrose, who talks about a “voluntary and sensible psychopathy” (Ballard 2000: 264), or blindly following the example of an appealing “leader” (in this case that of Bobby Crawford), in *Cocaine Nights* and *Super-Cannes* one gets the impression that the residents have assigned their own meaning to violence. This is another connection to popular culture because, according to Fiske, “thinking differently involves the subordinate in making *their* sense of their subordination, not in accepting the dominant sense of it or in making a sense with no relationship to domination” (2010: 47). What the residents of Estrella de Mar and Eden-Olympia are doing could even be described as De Certeau’s *La Perruque*, because while the protagonists are pretending to work for the continuation of the system and for saving themselves from a living death, it is obvious that many of them enjoy some of the ‘work’ and cherish the moments and practices that fulfill them regardless of whether they are experienced secretly or openly.

Through the voice that he lends to his protagonists, at times it seems that Ballard is resolved and seems to have given in to this new trend:

“Meaningless violence may be the true poetry of the new millennium. Perhaps only gratuitous madness can define who we are (2000: 262).” The wrong turn that he describes in his novels seems to be the only possible continuation of the current system we are living in: “The consumer society hungers for the deviant and unexpected. What else can drive the bizarre shifts in the entertainment landscape that will keep us ‘buying’? Psychopathy is the only engine powerful enough to light our imaginations, to drive the arts, sciences and industries of the world (2000: 265).”

People are ready to discard their old practices, and even the widely accepted commercial culture will not be enough for the society of the future. As Fitchett points out, the aspirations and dreams of the 1950’s American consumer society seem naïve and boring in comparison with modern-day wishes and aspirations of the affluent (2002: 314). Whether the proposed terrifying change takes place in the near or more distant future is irrelevant; more than a few aspects of these two novels could even be applied to our contemporary society. Taking on a more optimistic view of things, one might readily agree with Adams, who points out that we might not be there just yet: “Ballard unravels the secrets of his post-industrial elysium with panache, leading us into a society which is both an exaggerated parable for our times and a chill piece of futurology (2000).”

Fitchett goes a bit farther, comparing the Ballardian protagonists with “Sade’s eighteenth-century libertines” (2002: 314), further adding that “*Super-Cannes* is a vision for Sadism as a mass cultural commodity” (2002: 319). Fitchett also argues that Ballard has discovered “a ‘hidden’ contradiction in corporate capitalism and advanced consumerism” (2002: 312). He even goes so far as to point out a certain level of chilling understanding that Ballard’s detailed theory may invoke: “...a moral defence for the controlled consumer sadism of *Super-Cannes* can be developed, and this is perhaps the most alarming issue raised by the novel” (Fitchett 2002: 318).

Ballard’s world is a place where violence makes the people feel Barthes’ *jouissance*, a world where the carnival (which in these novels turns into a bloodbath) is all about the game, breaking rules and ignoring the referee (Fiske 2010: 69). The referee in this case would be the rejected moral order of the twentieth century. A life of neverending leisure and carefree existence is what many people, given the chance, would gladly choose.

If we take into account that the bourgeoisie prefers “recreative meanings” (Fiske 2010: 62) and that, as Smythe (1977) argues “capitalism has extended its power from the world of work into that of leisure” (as per Fiske 2010: 22), we should be careful what we wish for because, as Ballard points out: “The Adolf Hitlers and Pol Pots of the future won’t walk out of the desert. They’ll emerge from shopping malls and corporate business parks (2000: 256).”

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ПОПУЛАРНО НАСИЉЕ У РОМАНИМА Џ. Г. БАЛАРДА
КОКАИНСКЕ НОЋИ И СУПЕР-КАН

Сажетак

Популарна култура у савременом контексту уско је повезана са конзумеризмом. Према Џону Фиску, популарна културна је сама по себи контрадикторна. У свом пару романа који представљају дистопијска виђења Европе у блиској и, како се чини, неизбежној, будућности – *Кокаинским ноћима* и *Супер-Кану* – Џ. Г. Балард публици је представио две капиталистичке утопије. Попут већине критичких утопија, ови романи садрже одређене елементе дистопије, и у овом раду покушаћемо да прикажемо ове романе као приказе света у којем су новац и напредак два беспоговорна ауторитета. Након одвојених анализа обе приче, доћи ћемо до закључка да је овим романима популарна култура култура насиља као средство борбе против етаблираног система.

Кључне речи: популарна култура, популарно насиље, конзумеризам