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# From non-places to abject spaces: The annihilation of subjectivity in *Concrete Island* *

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## Abstract

James Graham Ballard, one of the prolific authors of speculative fiction, uses 'space' as an active part of his works. Especially, the urban space in the 20th century fuels a great deal of his dystopian fiction. Extrapolating the possibilities hidden in the built environment, he carries out an exploration of dangerous terrains in human nature in his works. Ballard's *Concrete Island* (1974) presents a critique of the motorways that gradually render human geography into an inhuman one. This paper examines *Concrete Island* through Marc Augé's concept of "non-places" and Julia Kristeva's notion of "abject". This study argues that the crisis in bourgeios subjectivity is caused by the ongoing diffusion of non-places in the cities in *Concrete Island*. To prove this argument, the paper discusses how the novel reflects the features of non-places and in what ways these qualities inflict damage on public spaces of the cities. This discussion also aims to provide a logical explanation of Maitland's absurd marooning on a traffic island in the midst of civilization. Subsequently, the examination is extended to abject spaces of the cities whose expulsion is a necessary precondition of bourgeois subjectivity. This part focuses on the oscillating tendencies of the protagonist between the restoration of bourgeois subjectivity and resignation from it. Using abject as a theoretical tool, the study highlights how Jane and Proctor function as reminders of symbolic order and Maitland's final identification with abject.

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# Yok-yerlerden iğrenç mekânlara: *Concrete Island*'da öznelliğin yok oluşu

## Öz

Spekülatif kurgunun en üretken yazarlarından biri olan James Graham Ballard, 'mekân' kavramını eserlerinin aktif bir parçası olarak kullanır. Özellikle 20. yüzyıl kentsel mekânı, yazarın distopik kurgusunun önemli bir bölümüne ilham kaynağı olmuştur. İnşa edilmiş çevrede saklı ihtimallerden geleceğe yönelik çeşitli çıkarımlar yapan yazar, eserlerinde insan doğasının tehlikeli alanlarını keşfeder. Ballard'ın *Concrete Island* (1974) adlı romanı, insan coğrafyasını giderek insansızlaştıran otoyolların bir eleştirisini sunar. Bu çalışma, *Concrete Island* romanını Marc Augé'nin "yok-yerler" ve Julia Kristeva'nın "iğrenç" kavramları aracılığıyla incelemektedir. Çalışma, *Concrete Island*'da burjuva öznelliğinin yaşadığı krizin kentlerde giderek çoğalmakta olan yok-yerlerden kaynaklandığını iddia eder. Bu iddiayı temellendirmek için, çalışma ilk olarak romanın yok-yerlerin özelliklerini nasıl yansıttığı ve bu özelliklerin kentlerin kamusal alanına ne gibi zararlar verdiği üzerinde durur. Bu tartışma, aynı zamanda medeniyetin tam ortasında Maitland'ın bir trafik adasında absürt bir şekilde mahsur kalmasının mantıklı bir açıklamasını sunmayı amaçlar. Devamında ise bu inceleme, burjuva öznelliğinin oluşumu için dışlanması bir ön koşul olan kentlerin iğrenç mekânlarını kapsayacak şekilde genişletilmektedir. Çalışmanın bu kısmı, ana karakterin burjuva öznelliğini yeniden kazanma ve bu öznelliği terk etme eğilimleri arasındaki tereddütlerini ele alır. Çalışma, iğrenç kavramını kuramsal bir araç olarak kullanarak, Jane ve Proctor'ın simgesel düzenin kırılganlığına nasıl işaret ettikleri ve Maitland'ın iğrenç ile nihai özdeşleşmesini vurgular.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Concrete Island,* yok-yer, iğrenç, otoyollar, öznellik

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## Introduction

One of the social developments unique to the 20th century is the surge of mobility at a planetary scale. Particularly, the period following WWII witnessed the democratization of private automobile use in Western countries. This sudden and radical shift engendered discussions as to its repercussions in multiple fields. Urban planning, environmental concerns, energy consumption, social and psychological outcomes, and cultural impact have been some of the topics on which the debates are held. While automobility is acknowledged to be a facilitator of personal freedom, annihilating geographical constraints, its footprint on the environment, consumption habits, and the social life of the cities have raised concerns among specialists in the respective fields. Literature has the potential to nourish these debates, some of which are empirical, through imaginative explorations of hypothetical scenarios. Zeynep Tuna Ultav, an architect, emphasizes that literature has the ability "to enhance relationship between collective memory and spaces, creating new practices of understanding penetrating into the layers of meaning of spaces" (2015, p. 25). Especially those authors who treat space as a formative category in their fiction discern these layers and transform the spaces into entities which have as significant a role as the characters in their works.

James Graham Ballard (1930-2009) is one of those authors who recognize the idiosyncrasies and agency of spaces. Central to his fiction is the effect of the built environment on human psychology and action. While he mainly focused on the scenarios of environmental catastrophe in the 1960s, his fiction took a new turn to the urban spaces whose features were identical to those of his readers in the 1970s. Written in 1974, *Concrete Island* puts the motorways, which are still a growing part of human geography today, under the spotlight for an investigation of the hitherto unseen possibilities embedded in them. This article aims to explore the role of spatial organization in *Concrete Island* with a specific focus on the concepts of 'non-place' and abjection. These conceptualizations enable one to understand the modern capitalist and materialist subjectivity of the protagonist of the novel and to grasp the role played by the traffic island in the dissolution of this subjectivity. To this end, the paper first deals with the effects of non-places on the public space and the relevance of this effect to the dynamics of the novel, and next evaluates the traffic island as an abject space that is necessarily produced as a residue of non-places.

*Concrete Island* opens with the crash that Robert Maitland, an architect, has on the motorway. Piercing through the embankment along the road, his automobile plunges onto a traffic island covered by overgrown vegetation and surrounded by a dense network of motorways. Initially, Maitland takes for granted that he would be rescued immediately, only to find that the traffic on the motorway flows incessantly as if nothing happened. The ensuing chapters focus on his trials to catch the attention of the drivers and his struggle for survival by the scarce resources offered by the island. In the meantime, along with his bodily health, his mental state breaks down, which leads him to reconsider his life outside the island and his alienation from both society and his family. Eventually, he encounters two inhabitants of the island, namely Jane Sheppard and Proctor. The former is a prostitute with a bourgeois background, and the latter is a mentally disturbed former acrobat who now lives isolated from society. Jane gradually heals Maitland; however, as he recovers, he seeks ways to dominate the island and its inhabitants. To achieve this goal, he begins to act impulsively and irrationally; "the island awakens in him unknown energies that had until then lain buried under the weight of civilized rationality" (Delville, 1998, p. 45). At this point, Maitland becomes doubtful about leaving the island; on the other hand, Jane is reluctant to call the police because she perceives them as a threat to both herself and Proctor. When he digs out Proctor's traumas, Maitland establishes dominance over Proctor, producing a colonizer and colonized relationship between them. However, towards the end of the novel, Proctor is killed by a repair vehicle and Jane leaves the island, suggesting Maitland to call for help. Maitland

displays a high level of ambivalence as to his desire to leave, and the novel ends with this obscurity. The novel displays intertextuality with its open reference to *Robinson Crusoe* and rather implied references to William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the myth of the Cretan labyrinth. However, Ballard does not always use these texts as a direct model for his own novel but rather exploits and sometimes subverts them in a way that can produce a postmodern narrative about the cultural condition of late capitalism. Space is an active agent in Ballard's fiction, and this novel puts the spaces of late capitalism under detailed scrutiny to express the quandaries and the state of mind of Western subjectivity in the 20th century.

## 1. The colonization of the city by non-places

*Concrete Island* is one of the products of a period marked by an augmented level of spatial mobility in England. The socio-spatial conditions under which the novel was written can be explained by some statistics that prove its historicity. In his inquiry into the history of the British motorways, George Charlesworth states that the total length of motorways in Britain was 95 miles in 1960; however, the number skyrocketed to 660 miles by the 1970s, along with 350 miles still under construction (1984, p. 50). Concomitant to this rapid transformation, there was the introduction of an ever-growing number of private automobiles in the same period. According to the Office for National Statistics, the number of motor vehicles registered for the first time was about 10 thousand in 1970, after which the figures soared and reached almost 19 thousand in 1974 in the United Kingdom (Department for Transport, 2011, p. 2). These changes were not mere numbers for Ballard but phenomenal alterations taking place within his sight. His post-war residence in the suburbia, Shepperton, gradually became saturated with networks of roads built to serve the intense use of Heathrow Airport. All in all, in this era, British society experienced a new geographical reconfiguration that facilitated local and global mobility at once. As it were, a colonization of the cityscape by the motorways occurred as a response to the society's demand for mobility.

Since space is a social production (Lefebvre, 1991), each respective ideology and its resultant social practices necessitate the emergence of a new spatial arrangement. Efficient means of transportation, dictated by capitalism's tendency for growth and globalization, have eventually led to what David Harvey calls "time-space compression" (1992). Motorways are one of the concrete spatial embodiments of the unprecedented levels of mobility in the 20th century and today, but they are also examples of what the French anthropologist Marc Augé calls "non-place". In *Concrete Island*, Maitland continually displays an ambivalence about being rescued by the civilized world; however, there are a number of instances in which he shows a desire to be rescued. Having an understanding of "non-places" can clarify why Maitland cannot escape the island during his attempts. Augé defines such places as those "which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (1995, p. 77-78). Produced by what Augé calls supermodernity, hospitals, motorways, and leisure parks are some of the examples of non-places. As opposed to the places that have unique characteristics and that are imbued with meaning for people, non-places lack the cultural and historical dimension, and they are usually identical across the globe. Though it remains an unfinished work, Los Angeles was considered to be the setting of the film adaptation of *Concrete Island*, once projected to be set by Scott Kosar and directed by Brad Anderson. Being an apotheosis of automobile culture, Los Angeles would indeed suit the purpose of the novel. However, this transposition has a more subtle implication than it seems. London, the original setting of the work, becomes dispensable and any location in the world might be a convenient setting, exactly because of the disengagement of non-places from history and culture.

Another hallmark of non-places is their over-emphasis on exactitude. Since they are essentially products of a specific type of economy that aims to boost functionality and

regulate a multitude of people's movements without letting them contact each other, such signs as numbers, dates, hours, or minutes are indispensable components of non-places. In Augé's words, they are "empirically measurable and analyzable" (1995, p. 115). Indeed, this logic reflects itself at the beginning of the novel:

> Soon after three o'clock on the afternoon of April 22nd 1973, a 35-year-old architect named Robert Maitland was driving down the high-speed exit lane of the Westway interchange in central London. Six hundred yards from the junction with the newly built spur of the M4 motorway, when the Jaguar had already passed the 70 m.p.h. speed limit, a blow-out collapsed the near-side tyre. (p. 7)

The tone presented here is akin to a navy deck log, which might be attributed to the intertextuality of the novel with *Robinson Crusoe*. However, the opening statements of the novel also implicitly inform the readers that they are now entering an impersonal realm where someone is in communication with the numbers and quantifiable elements, and meaning is produced only through them. This communication is only restricted to the rules and regulations of the motorway, leaving the drivers disconnected from each other. What makes the notion of 'non-places' so vital in understanding the logic presented in *Concrete Island* is their function of regulating human relations. Augé highlights that "non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality" (1995, p. 94). Though they apparently share the same space on the motorway, the communication is predominantly between the solitary drivers and the rules of the motorway, rather than among the drivers. For this reason, Maitland's endeavor to attract the attention of the drivers fails at every turn. As the narrator states, "the drivers were concentrating on the overhead route indicators" (p. 16), and "the pressure of the following traffic […] forced them on relentlessly" (p. 17). On this mobile non-place, none of the drivers can stop to rescue Maitland, even if they catch a momentary glimpse of his presence. In an instance, the novel goes so far as to imply that even a power like the state is unable to control this space of mobility when the police officer notices Maitland but cannot slow down (p. 18). At this point, one might rightfully ask why the policeman does not help Maitland in the following hours or days. This could be explained as an extrapolation of the contractuality that non-places offer. The drivers are caught up in an experience of transience and ephemerality. Zygmunt Bauman categorizes "non-places" among those that "are ostensibly public but emphatically non-civil sites" (2006, p. 102). An experience such as spotting a marooned driver immediately loses materiality, which turns Maitland into just a momentary spectacle.

However, except for only a few drivers, no one can notice Maitland's presence on the roadside. In fact, this blindness is a result of a culture that has been investing and building on the phenomenon of speed. French cultural theorist Paul Virilio (2007, p. 111) explains how human perception is altered by the ever-growing levels of speed, especially among the drivers: "In the driver's seat, the immediate proximity matters little, the only important thing is that which is held at a distance; in the continuum of the trip, what is ahead governs the progress, the speed of propulsion produces its own horizon: the *greater* the speed, the more *distant* the horizon." This commentary can be taken as a sound explanation of Maitland's seemingly absurd marooning in the heart of civilization. The inability to see 'here' and 'now' is one of the reasons for Maitland's failure to recognize the island by which he passes daily and the other drivers' failure to see Maitland. Their focus, which always lies far ahead, impedes them; thus, "they would be too busy to notice the scattered wooden trestles" caused by Maitland's accident (p. 10). In this spatial organization, the geography is condensed into departure and arrival points whereby the intervening distance is simply erased from the mental maps of the drivers, because "[d]welling at speed, people lose the ability to perceive local detail, to talk the strangers, to learn of local ways of life, to stop and sense each different

place" (Sheller&Urry, 2000, p. 747). During the first decades of its use, automobiles had not yet led to a flattening of geographical experience by speed. For instance, driving was "a kind of *flânerie* on wheels" for Virginia Woolf in the 1920s (Schröder, 2007, p. 136) in the sense that automobiles enabled the experience of the city just on another level of mobility. However, the kind of mobility represented in *Concrete Island* ignores and bypasses the city.

This shift also evokes discussions of public spaces in the cities and their transformation in time. Non-places are essentially antithetical to public spaces where intersubjective communication is carried out. Richard Sennett proposes that "[t]he city is that human settlement in which strangers are most likely to meet. The public geography of the city is civility institutionalized" (2002, p. 264). Sennett's all-too-obvious explanation has, in fact, the implications of urban planning that can foster human contact and forge a bond among them based on distance and regardless of their social background. However, the urban fabric represented in *Concrete Island* is obviously inimical to such social contacts, forcing spatial segregation of underprivileged individuals. Stigmatized by his very presence on a useless and derelict patch of ground, Maitland might well appear 'dangerous' to the drivers passing by him. For example, one of the drivers spotting Maitland "assume[s] him to be a tramp or drifter enjoying first drink of the day" (p. 35). In another example, to catch the attention of the drivers, Maitland is at pains to look neat and respectable through his clothing (p. 19). He has a tacit understanding of the class differences associated with certain locations in the cities, and, in this scene, he simply tries to prove that he does not belong to one of those locations. However, he fails to see that even if he somehow proved his true social identity, the traffic would be unlikely to stop. That is because non-places, exemplified by the motorways in the novel, are the embodiments of what Jürgen Habermas calls "instrumental rationality" (1984) in that efficiency and functionality take precedence over communicative action among the individuals.

Ballard's other urban fiction, *High-Rise*, includes a notable remark about the concrete landscape: "[T]his was an environment built, not for man, but for man's absence" (2014, p. 28). This observation goes for *Concrete Island*, as well. The whole landscape in *Concrete Island* resists the presence of man. Maitland cannot find enough space for a pedestrian to walk on the road (p. 17), the sound of the passing cars suppresses Maitland's call for help (p. 17), or the noise of the planes approaching the airport drowns his voice (p. 54). The only relation of the drivers to the surrounding environment is only auditory and visual, the former being mostly restricted to the sounds of the other vehicles and the latter being compromised by the speed itself. This landscape of sensory desolation lets human beings exist solely in the form of a human-machine hybrid rather than an independent rational individual – an image powerfully fostered by Enlightenment ideology. As such, the built environment dismantles the image of the rational individual who is an agent of the public sphere. Furthermore, the imagery of the labyrinth, often employed throughout the text, implies the impossibility of having total mastery over this constituent of the cityscape. To call for help, Maitland plans to set fire to his automobile and he takes out a London route map from the dashboard locker to use it as fuel for fire (p. 52). This scene has a significant detail: Although London is Maitland's city of residence, he needs a signifier to navigate through the city as if it were an unknown terrain.

Public and private space relations are deeply disturbed in both the city and Maitland's life. The explanations given so far testify to a quasi-privatization of the public sphere in the sense that the seemingly public spaces atomize individuals into their private cells. Maitland's personal life, on the other hand, bears the mark of public life. This argument draws from Richard Sennett's observations on public spaces of the 18$^{th}$ century. He venerates "impersonality" for being the bedrock of the public spaces for its function to liberate the individual from the burden of intimacy; and thus establish a sound relationship based on

social distance and regardless of their identities in the private sphere (2002, p. 264). However, Maitland idealizes a familial life, expected to be the opposite of the public space, based on impersonality and lack of intimacy. He ponders about his life as follows: "His relationships with Catherine, and his mother, even with Helen Fairfax, all the thousand and one emotionally loaded transactions of his childhood would have been tolerable if he had been able to pay for them in some neutral currency" (p. 142). Having been raised as a lonely child, Maitland idealizes solitude as a desirable state of being and evaluates all his personal relations as if they were a business affair. As it were, the logic of non-places is at work in Maitland's relationships in that he evades intimacy and commitment.

## 2. The crisis of subjectivity

*Concrete Island* navigates through a new kind of space belonging to the 20th century and conjoining subjectivity. Each symbolic structure is predicated on what it excludes as much as how it defines itself. At this juncture, the island on which Maitland is marooned becomes the space against which modern capitalist spatiality, or non-places, defines itself. Julia Kristeva's concept of "abject" is a useful theoretical tool in recognizing the spatial dichotomies in *Concrete Island.* According to Kristeva, symbolic order is constituted through a radical exclusion of the abject: "The abject has only one quality of object- that of being opposed to *I*" (1982, p. 1). The establishment of an order is dependent on the exclusion of the abject. In a similar vein, Mary Douglas remarks that "[d]irt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (2001, p. 36). Abject is not considered an object because it does not represent a simple dichotomy. It neither respects borders nor "assumes a prohibition, a rule or a law" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Since this concept is inextricably bound with subjectivity and order, it has been applied in several fields, including urban studies. David Sibley's *Geographies of Exclusion* (2003) illustrates how the logic of abjection operates in Western cities. He argues that just as individual subjectivity is constituted through the mechanisms of exclusion, modern Western cities produce spaces where those people labeled as undesirable, deviant, diseased, dirty, or dangerous are expelled. Furthermore, the social imaginaries about these people also include the geographies where they reside: "Feelings about others, people marked as different, may also be associated with places. Nervousness about walking down a street in a district which has been labeled as dangerous […] may be the [kind] of sensations engendered by other environments" (Sibley, 2003, p. 3-4). Those living outside the abject spaces of the cities either deliberately evade such spaces by arranging their spatial practices or, as Zygmunt Bauman states, the abject spaces of the cities are simply blank spaces in the mental maps of the city dwellers (2006, p. 104). The place where Maitland is marooned rather falls into the second category. However, the novel does not treat the island as a mere blank space; it becomes a complex structure through which Maitland has an epiphanic experience once he gradually discovers it.

Andrzej Gasiorek defines the traffic island in the novel as a non-place (2005, p. 108). Though the island can be recognized as a non-place in the sense that it is *not a place* recognized by the city dwellers, it does not properly match the non-places as they are defined by Augé. In many ways, the island is in contrast with the surrounding terrain which consists of a concrete and orderly realm. The narrator defines the island as an "unofficial municipal dump" (p. 13) where the discarded items of life under modernity, such as rusting cars or car parts, billboards, and furniture, are dumped. On the one hand, these objects are proof of a rapid turnover of goods in a society of consumption. On the other hand, the existence of these items is closely related to abject because they are reminders of the fragility of the symbolic order. That these rusting objects do not belong to an earlier century but to the 20th century makes them even more significant with respect to Maitland's subjectivity, for they are the

very objects that define and sustain his identity. Along with the other vehicles, Maitland's Jaguar, a part of his identity, becomes just another discarded item. It is also possible to extend this idea of decay to Maitland's bodily integrity. Kristeva puts forward that "[e]xcrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death" (1982, p. 71). After the crash, the novel repeatedly exposes Maitland's wounds and bodily fluids, which implies a rift in his identity and reminds him of the materiality of his body.

Another reason why the island cannot be a non-place is that it consists of architectural remnants of English history, such as the ground plans of an Edwardian terraced house, a church, and a World War II air-raid shelter. This shows that the island is deeply historical when it is compared to the motorways and high-rise blocks surrounding it. The concrete landscape is built at the expense of the historical and cultural history of London, and this exemplifies "how the present production of postmodern spatiality takes place on the ruins *of the past* which it abandons and suppresses" (Groes, 2012, p. 130). In his account of the cultural history of concrete, Adrian Forty notes that it is "so often regarded as the material of oblivion, erasing and obliterating memory, cutting people off from their past, from themselves, from each other" (2012, p. 197). If being ahistorical is one of the defining characteristics of non-places, the island apparently does not fit their scope. However, the historicity of the island and the antithetical characteristic of the surrounding environment stand for the spatial history of Western societies in which non-places obliterate the relational and historical places.

The identities of the two characters, Jane and Proctor, concretize the process of abjection. While the former is a prostitute, the latter is a demented outcast figure who previously worked as an acrobat. Ballard makes sure that the island as a waste place is complemented by two social wastes. Both of them are diametrically opposed to the bourgeois sensibilities of the social class to which Maitland belongs. The spatial organization and the spatial practices of the individuals in modern capitalist societies ensure that a figure like Maitland is unlikely to confront such outcast figures. Moreover, considering his profession, one can claim that Maitland's task is to enforce the separation of socially acceptable individuals from those deemed 'unfit' and 'undesirable'. As David Ian Paddy asserts, amongst many other tasks of the architects, "gentrified housing schemes" were popular in the 1970s (2015, p. 143), and such projects were the embodiment of urban segregation par excellence. For this reason, the encounter provides Maitland with both an exhilarating experience and a sense of fear – the same emotions evoked by abjection. Having a bourgeois background but now being a prostitute, Jane acts as a reminder of the abject and the fragility of the bourgeois way of life. However, of the two outcasts, the imagery attached to Proctor particularly needs to be marked due to its implied mythological reference. The narrator occasionally delineates him as a bull-like figure (p. 76, 109, 110), which evokes the myth of the Cretan labyrinth. This imagery also complements the idea of the motorway network as a maze, for the Minotaur of this structure is Proctor. Minotaur's story can be associated with Kristeva's notion of abject, and this association is key to understand Proctor's position in relation to society. Kristeva specifies that abject is "[w]hat does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). In the myth, the Minotaur displays a hybrid appearance, having the body of a man and the head of a bull, thus having the ambiguity related to abject. Furthermore, the Minotaur is a reminder of King Minos' shame (Nichols, 2008, p. 470), for it was born as a result of the transgression of social norms. It needs to be expelled from the sight for the king to sustain his legitimacy. Similar to Minotaur, Proctor is a source of shame that needs to be expelled from society. His raw and unchecked power approximates him to the state of an animal. However, Proctor's expulsion is partly

voluntary, for, despite all his naivete and simplicity, Proctor is well aware of the impossibility of his existence in the social sphere. As a result, being a social outcast and having only the island as a grotesque utopian space for himself, Proctor, at first, displays a hostile manner to Maitland- a representative of the world that once humiliated and traumatized him. For instance, Jane tells Maitland that a police officer physically attacked and urinated on Proctor in the past (p. 97), which, in turn, leads him to have an "unconcealed strain of violence, a long-borne hostility to the intelligent world on which he would happily revenge himself" (p. 95). Proctor's existence lingering on the verge of animal dissociates him from the rational society, and Jane's dilemma about calling for help for Maitland from the outside world stems from her reservations about the intrusion of this world into Proctor's safe haven.

On the other hand, for Maitland, Proctor functions as a source of anxiety because his grotesque image threatens his subjectivity constituted by the Eurocentric cultural codes. At this point, it might be useful to take a detour to Europe's imperial history and how this discourse viewed the natives and those who were believed to live outside the civilized world. David Sibley remarks that "those threatening people beyond the boundary represent the features of human existence from which the civilized have distanced themselves—close contact with nature, dirt, excrement, overt sexuality" (2003, p. 51). Proctor represents the abject people that once became both a source of repulsion and fascination for the European imagination. Maitland's confrontation with Proctor, which starts with feelings of anxiety and fear, gradually becomes one in which Maitland wields a repressive power on Proctor, much in the same way the Europeans did to the colonized people. In this regard, Maitland and Proctor's relationship openly reflects that of Robinson Crusoe and Friday:

> 'Proctor- I need food. I'll pass out if I don't get something to eat.' The tramp stared at him warily. He raised the rat-traps, but Maitland shook his head. 'No food,' Proctor said flatly. 'That's rubbish- we had breakfast. Meat, potatoes, salad- where did you get it?' (p. 126).

Maitland's disapproval of Proctor's proposition is highly reminiscent of Crusoe's intervention into Friday's dietary habits. The issue of cannibalism in *Robinson Crusoe* matches Proctor's indecent food proposal. Discussing the issue of abjection in *Robinson Crusoe*, Gökhan Albayrak indicates that "[Crusoe] strives to maintain the boundary between himself and the inhuman cannibals. A perpetual defence against nondifferentiation marks his narrative" (2022, p. 1475). A similar defense mechanism labels the rats "as a carrier of disease" and intruders with "[their] occasional tendency to violate the boundaries" (Sibley, 2003, p. 28). Both Crusoe and Maitland try to evade abject or becoming abject to sustain their ties with the symbolic order, though Maitland opts for a different path in the end.

The antagonism of the island to the symbolic order becomes even more manifest during Maitland's engagement with the island and its inhabitants. Abject, as Kristeva states, "draws me toward the place where the meaning collapses" (1982, p. 2). The drivers on the road are embedded in a system of signification enabled by the road signs, while Maitland experiences the resistance of the island to the process of linguistic signification. He tries to call for help twice by writing a message to the drivers; however, these messages are obliterated in each attempt (p. 62, 73). The following chapters reveal that the obliteration of the messages was not something mysterious but Proctor's deed. Jane explains that "[Proctor] never learned to read and write. He hates the words of any kind" (p. 102). At this point, another modality of signification proposed by Kristeva, 'semiotic', is at work. Semiotic expression is associated with the stage of *chora* in a child's development, and "*chora* is a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 25). Semiotic is a pre-Oedipal and pre-linguistic aspect of communication that lacks a structured linguistic expression. During the course of the novel, Proctor either talks in distorted grammar or tries to express himself through unintelligible grunts or lets Jane decipher information about himself

to Maitland. For instance, he refers to himself in the third person singular pronoun, which implies that he has not properly entered the symbolic register in which a clear demarcation between self and other, as well as subject and object, is drawn. The problem about the symbolic register is also evident in view of Proctor's lacking surname while Jane has one. Lacan states that "[i]t is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified [the] person with the figure of the law" (2006, p. 278). While Maitland discovers some old photographs showing at least an obscure father figure related to Jane (p. 106), the text makes no references to a father figure related to Proctor. What is more intriguing is that the text does not refer to Maitland's father, either. This is an implication of the substitution of Proctor by Maitland in the end.

According to Kristeva, semiotic is a modality predating "numbers and forms," and it is "*amorphous*" (1984, p. 243). In a way, it radically differentiates from the logic governing the non-places that mediate the individual's relation to a higher authority through a linguistic signification system. Hence, it harbors the potentiality of resistance to a given order. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, Florian Cord (2017) identifies the motorway and the island with the striated and smooth spaces, respectively, and adds that "the island does not allow itself to be overcoded" (2017, p. 87). The island appears to be resistant to the symbolic human activities: "[T]he waist-high grass, marked by the winding corridors that recorded his uncertain movements […] was setting itself again, almost hiding the silver Jaguar" (p. 14). The traces of Maitland's movement, which is a sort of signification in itself, fail to endure in a way that foreshadows the futility of Maitland's later attempts to wield power over the island and its inhabitants. In exchange for help, Maitland offers Jane some money that he keeps in the trunk of his car, and Jane simply replies, "I'd better look after these [car keys]" (p. 86), as if Maitland offered something perilous. This makes sense when money is considered to be an item belonging to symbolic signification. Jane simply refuses to introduce money as a meaningful signifier to the economy of the island and to protect Proctor from assimilation and subjugation to the symbolic order structuring the world beyond the embankments. The tension arising from Maitland's intrusion into the island, the utopian space for Jane and Proctor, governs much of the text. In fact, Maitland appears to be partly successful in his attempts to colonize the island when he turns Proctor into a wine addict, thus enforcing wine as a signifier instead of money (p. 129) and when he rides on Proctor for the exploration and control of the island (p. 143). However, during these rides, Proctor goes for the paths he desires rather than those dictated by Maitland, and this undermines Maitland's authority as a colonial power.

In an environment where the authority becomes crippled, the symbolic expressions that might be associated with the spatio-temporality of capitalism, shrinks, as well. The first days on the island are marked by Maitland's efforts to keep track of time on a daily and hourly basis. However, as he loses his will to leave the island, these abstract expressions of time fade into obscurity. Towards the end, "Maitland realized that he had forgotten what day it was- Wednesday or perhaps Friday" (p. 157). In the final stage of his experience on the island, his sense of time is reduced only to the diurnal cycle of day and night. Time precision is one of the preconditions of a capitalist economy that has to regulate labor time, efficiency, and capital accumulation. For this reason, the lack of temporal signifiers is one of the implications of his abdication from his role in the capitalist economy along with all his social ties. Noelle McAfee resembles the distinction between semiotic and symbolic to such dichotomies as "between nature and culture, between body and mind, between the unconscious and consciousness, and between feeling and reason" (2004, p. 16). Maitland's experience of time becomes one that is unmediated through a symbolic form of language, being closer to the latter terms in the dichotomies stated by McAfee. The sensory immediacy renders symbolic forms of expression redundant because Maitland's experience is akin to

*chora* "in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 25). Thus, the novel displays signs of regression in Maitland's social identity.

The island facilitates Maitland's coming to terms with his real conditions of existence in the modern world. Cenk Tan evaluates Maitland's story as a process of alienation, one in which he is firstly alienated from his family, later from his society, and lastly from himself (Tan, 2023, p. 74). However, it would be misleading to assume that this alienation or dissolution of subjectivity starts only after his marooning on the island. The island only enables an epiphanic moment of realization, as can be observed when he exclaims, "I am the island!" (p. 71). This expression might be interpreted from multiple perspectives. First, 'the island' does not refer to the patch of ground where Maitland stays for several days. After all, Jane's final exit from this place proves that it is not an island, at all. Moreover, the title of the novel leads to much confusion about its referent when one spots that the island is densely covered by wild vegetation while the world outside the island is filled with concrete structures. In this interpretation, the image of the island functions as a metaphor for Maitland's state of mind and his infatuation with hyper-individualism rather than a tangible geographical location. Secondly, Maitland's exclamation signifies the abolition of the distinction between subject and object. The island is no longer an object in the form of a tabula rasa waiting to be possessed and shaped by an architect, but it is the identity of the architect himself. This point needs to be elaborated through the category of abject. Kristeva states that abject is "the place where I am not and which permits me to be" (1982, p. 3). As it has been emphasized above, the island consists of decaying and rusting items and architectural remains. However, their mere presence does not render the island abject; the island becomes an abject space in a strict sense when it is recognized that the persistence of capitalist and consumerist culture is predicated on the formation and expulsion of its waste within the borders of the embankments. Maitland's identification of the island approximates him to the state of abject, which jeopardizes his subjectivity as a capitalist and consumer individual. The implications of this identification are closely related to the question of whether Maitland is going to leave the island and restore its social identity or not. When Jane is about to leave the island and proposes to call for help, Maitland simply answers, "I'll leave the island, but I'll do it in my own time" (p. 174). Despite the ambiguity in the reply, he "felt no real need to leave the island" (p. 176) when he is alone on the island, at last. His identification with the abject space and preference to stay there suggest that Maitland's initial crash was, in fact, a suicidal attempt which is a final blow to his burgeoning alienation from social and familial ties. Amongst many other things, Kristeva associates abject with corpse and death, expressing that "[i]t is no longer I who expel, but "I" is expelled" (1982, p. 3-4). Maitland's experience is akin to *jouissance* that is a transgressive act which exceeds the limits of pleasure; "jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*], Violently and painfully" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 9). Thus, Maitland enters into a realm where social norms, meaning, and identity are nullified, and boundaries separating life and non-life are broken down. Maitland's association with abject and death can also be elucidated through *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe's state is close to abject since he is cut off from the society (the other) prior to his dominance over Friday; only after this domination, "[is he] able to keep the abject at bay by means of establishing the difference between subject and object" (Albayrak, 2022, 1491). Proctor's death and Jane's departure mark the disappearance of the object that enables one's subjectivity in the symbolic realm. "[Maitland] was glad that both Proctor and the young woman had gone. Their presence had brought out unwelcome strains in his character, qualities irrelevant to the task of coming to terms with the island" (p. 175). Despite their antagonism to the mainstream society, the sight of Jane and Proctor denotes the existence of a social body. Although Maitland can never

succeed in fully dominating these figures, their very presence urges him to act in accordance with the Western subjectivity that is based on cultural codes and hierarchies. However, since Maitland's covert intention is exactly being freed from this subjectivity, he welcomes their absence. All in all, both Crusoe and Maitland achieve their goals; while the former successfully restores himself to the symbolic order, the latter embraces abject at the expense of his life.

## Conclusion

*Concrete Island* offers a critique of modern urban planning and uses this topic as a fertile ground on which the crisis of modern capitalist subjectivity is demonstrated. The novel uses the motorways to point out the impact of the proliferating non-places on social bonds and communication. Foregrounding the inhuman and affectless aspect of the spaces of mobility, the text raises questions about the priority given to functionalism and efficiency underpinning much of the urban fabric. This questioning also subverts the agency and authority of the architect figure as the creator of spaces. Moreover, the text further highlights the social limitations imposed by non-places by attributing their characteristics to Maitland's social and familial ties. Additionally, through the inability of the protagonist to stop the traffic, the dissolution of the traditional public space by non-places is displayed. The non-place presented in the novel fosters a culture of individualism pushed to its limits, in a way that atomizes the users of space. The other outcome of this new spatiality is the production of abject spaces. Already severely alienated from each other, the drivers remain totally oblivious to the lives and predicaments associated with the abject spaces. On this level, the novel delves into the consequences of urban planning insensitive to social differences. However, Ballard uses this space not only for broad social criticism but also as a ground on which Maitland's mental state and subjectivity are tested. For Maitland, the island turns into a site of conflict between opposing forces, symbolic and abject, at the end of which abject takes the upper hand. Being severed from one's society and even from one's self marks the dissolution of Maitland's subjectivity. Ballard undercuts the belief in the rational individual and his/her faculties in the 20$^{th}$ century by setting the novel against a literary forebear like *Robinson Crusoe* – a work that glorifies the ingenuity of Western rational subject. The overwhelming question is what the difference between a smooth functioning non-place and a disorderly abject space is if both of them undermine the character's role as a social being. The uncanny resemblance between these two spheres evidently urges one to question non-places and their seismic impact on social identity.

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