SPACE, PLACE, AND IDENTITY IN YEVGENY ZAMYATIN’S WE
AND J.G. BALLARD’S THE DROWNED WORLD
by
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Swanstrom, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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Intimate spaces play a key role in the development of human identity, constructing identity through an internalized experience of the house itself. Building on Bachelard’s theories in The Poetics of Space, I argue that characters in Yevgeny Zamyatin’s We and J.G. Ballard’s The Drowned World gain a new awareness of self after experiencing nature as a substitute for the house. The emergence of a new identity occurs because nature offers protection from the forces that inhibit both D-503 and Kerans’s individual growth; it offers the safety of the house that neither character is allowed in a private home: D-503 because of the panoptic space of the One state and Kerans due to the nature of the changing circumstances of the environment and his own biology that force him to accept his role as a "new" human and the jungle as "home."
DEDICATION

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In his work *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard posits that “…Every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house” (136). Intimate spaces, such as attics, basements, rooms, and corners, and the objects that fill them, all play a key role in the development of human identity, shaping the self through an internalized experience of the house itself. Intimate spaces, then, are not created to allow freedom of reflection, but rather to create the self one becomes, constructing identity in the perceived relationships with spaces. Bachelard’s premise, though his focus mainly concerns spaces of the home, also begins to lend itself to a critique of human identity in relation to larger outside spaces. In significant moments in Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* as well as J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*, nature becomes a substitute for these intimate spaces when characters are forced to encounter the ways in which their identity construction is directly dependant on their changing relationships with natural space.

Though the authors and novels themselves occupy different time periods as well as subject matter, Zamyatin and Ballard share similar historical backgrounds that likely influenced their respective novels. Both authors were affected by traumatic events that displaced them from their own homes. Ballard experienced a 3-year detention in an internment camp in Shanghai, and Zamyatin a series of exiles following his arrest during the Russian Revolution of 1905. According to Anindita Banerjee’s recent work defining the place of science fiction in creating Russian modernity, Russian SF is “assessed almost exclusively in terms of a historic rupture with totalitarianism and an aesthetic rebellion against Socialist Realist literature mandated by the state” (4). Banerjee suggests that
Russian SF differed from other veins of science fiction in that its appropriation was both active and reactive:

Unlike Euro-American science fiction, it was imbued with a remarkable performative and pedagogical function that cannot easily be summarized as either the passive embrace of science and technology or antithetical reactions to their importation from the West…[but rather] appropriated the principal instruments of capitalist modernity to construct alternative models of development and progress. (10)

Her argument is certainly true within the framework of her critique, but it does not allow for exceptions.

The work of Ballard, coming from his unique perspective of living in Shanghai as an émigré from Britain during WWII, also speaks to the ambiguous nature of “progress” in terms of Western thought and challenges traditional representations of individuality. Ballard’s novel as much as Zamyatin’s is a testament to the inherent change in the nature of humans in response to growing social and political upheaval as well as scientific change of their respective eras. More importantly, both provide access to alternative models of constructing identity as a response to being displaced from the home and the subsequent search to replace that private space. This may not come as a surprise when one considers that both Zamyatin and Ballard suffered at the hands of government authority. Zamyatin was beaten, jailed, and exiled after satirizing the Totalitarian state; Ballard spent years as a teenager in Shanghai studying what he deemed the humiliation and stripping of authority of the adult prisoners (Ballard “About” 2). In an interview with Travis Elborough Ballard reflects on his writing: “I feel the writer of fantasy has a marked tendency to select images and ideas which directly reflect the internal landscapes of his mind, and the reader of fantasy must interpret them on this level” (13). As such, the respective political pressure and the forced change of living standards and environments both authors experienced laid the groundwork for the intersections between human identity and the environment present
In both novels, creating a historical connection despite differences in time and location.

In these novels, personal identity is a direct result of an encounter with intimate spaces and the outside landscapes that replace them when the safety of those structures is challenged. This element binds two very different novels, for though set in opposing circumstances, I will show that characters in both struggle against social constructions that inhibit the freedom of personal identity, which is later granted through each character’s new participation in the natural landscape.

In Zamyatin’s 1921 dystopic novel *We*, juxtaposition of natural space against the constructed landscape highlights how the One State functions as a prime example of machine-like order. Characters in the novel are made to act as constituent parts of a large interdependent system that mimics the idea that “modernist science considers the universe to be essentially a giant machine the component parts of which can be conceived of as being isolated and separate from one another. It also maintains that the various parts of this machine, that is natural phenomena, behave in a regular, ordered, law-like manner. Their behavior is causally determined” (Burns 67). The goal of the One State is to use this uniformity to assert control. The characters, called “ciphers,” are each responsible for a specific function that defines his or her place and identity within the One State. Because the ciphers perform different “jobs” to keep the machine of the One State running in perfect order, they are taught that their actions create harmony: no one is more important or distinct from another. The ciphers are limited in expressing individuality, forced to become “the real-life, six-wheeled, steel heroes of a great epic” while lifting their spoons, chewing, and swallowing at the exact same Table-appointed moment (Zamyatin 12). Conversely, the Ancient House, a relic of the time before the totalitarian state, and other private spaces throughout the work serve as an inversion of that control, complicating the experience of space as well as the development of identity in relation to its environment, the small-scale universe in which it participates.

In a similar fashion, each character’s psychological landscape in J.G. Ballard’s
1962 novel *The Drowned World* is at odds with the natural environment; the link between psyche and environment, however, is explicitly produced as a result of trauma from a large-scale disaster that changes not only the topography of the land, but also the individual and collective unconscious of its survivors. This trauma occurs as a result of environmental force rather than as a result of political force (It should be noted that Zamyatin’s society in *We* exists in a post-apocalyptic environment, though the nature of the cataclysmic event is not explicitly discussed). Although the trauma Ballard engages with in this novel is a physical undoing of the landscape after an ecological disaster, the two novels share the idea that human identity is transformed by one’s relationship with intimate spaces and nature. If one considers Neil Evernden’s argument that “there is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in context” and that the self exists only as “self in place,” then space and place can transform the very nature of humans in response to their shifting participation in newfound natural environments (Glotfelty and Fromm xxviii).

In *We*, characters’ identities are originally molded by the panoptic architecture—tall, sharply angular glass buildings that restrict personal space and privacy. Characters are so oppressed by the constructed landscape that they believe personal freedom and expression of individuality are immoral; they do not question the control that their every moment is built upon, but instead justify and praise it as a “beautiful” way to order their actions and functions as parts of a machine-like whole, as when the protagonist D-503 compares the Integral hangar where he works to a ballet performance:

I noticed the machines. Eyes shut, oblivious, the spheres of the regulators were spinning; the cranks were twinkling, dipping to the right and to the left; the shoulders of the balance wheel were rocking proudly; and the cutting head of the perforating machine curtsied… Instantly I saw the greater beauty of this grand mechanized ballet…its perfect non-freedom. (Zamyatin 5-6)

The mere sight, however, of the wild natural landscape that exists beyond the perimeter of the Green Wall is enough to force D-503 to change his idea of human function and
purpose and to question his very identity. Likewise, in *The Drowned World*, the protagonist Kerans’s metamorphosis is motivated by the inversion of the idea that man can control nature. His experience in the predatory environment forces Kerans, Bea, Hardman, and a host of other characters to redefine what it means to be human in a world where nature is regressing. Characters must question the purpose of their relationships, their understanding of their personal drive to survive, and their functions in an environment that no longer provides sustainable resources or comfortable living conditions for humans. Even though the environment has been historically viewed as a resource, in these novels, both inside and outside spaces (environments) become agents for change.

This way of depicting the environment goes beyond the Romantic notion of simply situating oneself in relationship to the environment rather than social others. Piers Stephens describes dystopic literature, such as *We* and *The Drowned World*, as being:

- both in its historical significance and in its often characteristic concerns with power, liberty, and instrumentalisation...an ideal area for philosophical investigation into the deepest human fears and concerns raised by the dynamics of modernity, engaging as it does with the characteristic fears of a technological era in one of its most distinctive sources of artistic expression. (78)

Zamyatin himself insists that science fiction created a new way of thinking about modern Russia, observing SF’s potential to offer additional areas of inquiry, especially as can serve as a bridge between alternate methods of perception: “Characterization of science fiction as the mediator between physical mechanics and transcendental metaphysics offers a particularly rich example of the unprecedented possibilities that it opened up for bridging so-called Western and Russian ways of being and knowing” (qtd. in Banerjee13). It is clear that Zamyatin uses this bridge at the very least as a platform to satirize an oppressive government, and while there have been definite changes in the themes genre fiction has produced since the publication of *We* in 1924, the political climate of the 1960s likewise pushed SF toward social commentary. As Istvan Csery-Ronay posits, by this time,
“Science Fiction...ceased to be a genre per se, becoming instead a mode of awareness about the present” (qtd. in Banerjee 3). This movement away from genre and towards a way of thinking suggests that the environmentally traumatic situations that populate 60s era SF stem from a consideration of the atomic disasters and radiated bodies of the previous era’s plots and protagonists. While Zamyatin’s novel may have focused explicitly on the turbulence of technology and scientific inquiry on the human, both novels and short stories of this era attempt to define what it means to be human in a modern world delineated by alienation where the implicit psychological change takes precedence over the “hard science.” The Drowned World engages the reader to identify with the “other” at the heart of the story in an effort to complicate and question these changing identity structures; furthermore, while We may engage more seriously with technology of the modern world, the result is the same: both works purport to “provide the road map for a new class of subjects...to reinvent their lives, realities, and even beliefs” (Banerjee 3).

Both Zamyatin and Ballard take on similar questions: in what ways do humans reflect and embody their surroundings; and how would these identities be challenged if the boundaries of constructed civilizations were threatened or removed? In both novels the psychological effects of unfamiliar, post-apocalyptic space on the emotions and behaviors of characters force a new awareness of self in relation to location in the environment; thus, these spaces become an interzone between disaster and human consciousness. Investigation of We and The Drowned World shows how the exchange between place, intimate space, and psyche (inner landscape) work together to form a dichotomous relationship of desire and revulsion in terms of identity and environment, characterized by intervals of acceptance, satisfaction, apprehension, and disdain as D-503 and Kerans discover emerging characteristics at odds with their former understandings of self and environment. In a sense, characters confront “otherness” within themselves as they experience natural environments to which they are not accustomed.

Zamyatin and Ballard’s novels further Hegel’s idea that the Other normally asserts
itself as another person against whom we measure our own consciousness, speculating that the psyche can be measured against one’s forced adaptation to new environments. In a recent work tracing the historical presence of science fiction, Darko Suvin regards the genre as allowing for "a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than towards a static mirroring of the author’s environment...not only a reflecting of but also on reality" and defining its practice as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" (qtd. in Bould and Vint 17). Examples of this estrangement in many of Ballard’s works describe natural spaces in ways that seem almost, but not quite, familiar: the “vermilion” sands in “The Cage of Sand” or the pulsating light of the sun that becomes a drumbeat in The Drowned World. Further examples abound in the genre, including the future worlds posited in Wells’s Time Machine, the cell-like apartments in Forster’s “The Machine Stops,” or the forest habitats in Le Guin’s The Word for World is Forest. Much as in Bachelard’s explanation of the dialectics of inside and outside space in The Poetics of Space, human interactions with place and in space in such texts shapes understanding of the self. It is worth noting, as Marc Augé discusses in his anthropological study of contemporary place and space, that “One of the major concerns of ethnology has been to delineate signifying spaces in the world, societies identified with cultures conceived as complete wholes: universes of meaning, of which individuals...inside them are just an expression” (33). His study of modern cultures suggests that closed worlds account for much of the way individuals and groups within particular societies develop ideologies, forming the basis for self-identification as well as a projection of group identity.

Zamyatin and Ballard’s novels echo this formula, as their characters struggle to interpret the “universes of meaning” within the fluctuating dynamics of their relationships with inside and outside spaces. While a survey of current scholarship suggests that “Zamiatin’s novel has always been one of the fundamental texts on which the theory of totalitarian government, which remains a major topic for discussion both in the West and in Russia, was based,” there is very little discussion about the nature of individual identity
(Cartwright and Dobreno 332). The same is true of *The Drowned World*; though there is ample area for discussion, most criticism tends to focus on the novel strictly as ecocriticism. Engaging in a discussion of Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, I will argue that characters in both novels gain a new awareness of self after experiencing nature as a substitute for the house. The emergence of a new identity occurs because nature offers protection from the forces that inhibit both D-503 and Kerans’s individual growth; it offers the safety of the house that neither character is allowed in a private home: D-503 because of the panoptic space of the One state and Kerans due to the nature of the changing circumstances of the environment and his own biology that force him to accept his role as a “new” human and the jungle as “home.” There have been no interpretations of either novel utilizing Bachelard’s theory of dialectics of outside and inside, nor his understanding of the house as intimate space, yet these are fundamental points to consider in the development of both Zamyatin’s D-503 and Ballard’s Kerans. While Zamyatin’s work predates Bachelard’s, *We* anticipates the idea that “an image [of the house], at times very unusual, appear[s] to be a concentration of the entire psyche” (Bachelard xviii). Similarly, *The Drowned World* can be read as, building on Jung’s theory of mental structure (which I will discuss later in this thesis), Bachelard’s idea that “there is ground for taking the house a tool for analysis of the human soul” (Bachelard xxvii). Bachelard’s theory is a particularly relevant bridge between these novels for this reason, and as Dr. John Stilgoe relates in the 1994 Foreword, because Bachelard still “resonates deeply, vibrating at the edges of imagination, exploring the recesses of the psyche, the hallways of the mind… In the house Bachelard discovers a metaphor of humanness” (vii). The intimate spaces and the vast landscapes in both novels combine to offer a psychogeographical survey of each character’s transformation. In Bachelard’s theory, both produce a conscious familiarity that creates identity. When characters become suspicious of customary spaces, they are forced to look at others and themselves in new ways, especially redefining nature as a space representative of the house. These discoveries are uncomfortable mostly because the rapidly and constantly changing
landscapes force characters to reconfigure their connections to both the immediate and personal space of the home as well as to nature. These uncertain connections create not just a difficulty in understanding the environment, but also shift the way the character must understand himself in position to this new space.

In part one of my thesis, through a critique of D-503’s engagement with the landscape of the One State and his discovery of private, intimate space, I explore the character’s discovery of an individual self outside the enforced doctrine of the One State. Using Bachelard’s theory of intimate spaces as a metaphor for humanness, I move from a discussion of policed spaces to private spaces in We, demonstrating differences in the spaces of the Ancient House and other places not subjected to the panoptic gaze of the government; these spaces force D-503 to recognize his own difference manifested in the concept of the soul, and earns him subjectivity. I analyze and trace D-503’s contact with the world beyond the Green Wall and how that encounter with natural space transforms his identity and allows him to discover an individuality that both frees and terrifies him.

Chapter III then discusses the role of the inside spaces of abandoned buildings versus the dangerous outside environment in The Drowned World, considering the connections and contrasts between Kerans’s and D-503’s development. This chapter discusses Kerans’s unstable place in an unfamiliar landscape, where nature has taken the place of a traditional human-built home, forcing a reconsideration of how humans interact with the natural environment. Here, I analyze Kerans’s transformative identity as he devolves, both psychologically and physically, and is confronted with the challenges of responding to an environment that is potentially destructive and outside his ability to shape. I discuss the communal dreams that interrupt individuality, Kerans’s subsequent identification with his “animal” existence, and his refusal to be part of a communal society. Throughout, I draw parallels and distinctions between his development and that of D-503’s in We, closing with final thoughts on both texts.
CHAPTER II. “A CAPTIVE IN THIS WILD CAGE:” INTIMATE SPACES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF (I)ENTITY IN YEVGENY ZAMYATIN’S WE

In We Zamyatin’s character D-503 struggles to accept the existence of the concept of the soul as he moves from the realms of communal and policed spaces into a discovery of private and intimate experiences with space. The panoptic nature of the city’s geography functions as a mechanism by which “…the disclosure created by the glass walls prevents the resentment of the numbers from coalescing into active resistance. At the same time, this constant exposure renders resistance even less likely by facilitating the assimilation of the individual into the collective” (Amey 26). Although the collectivized spaces of the One State attempt to eliminate all boundaries and differences in a forced, if imaginary unity, I propose that the spaces which D-503 encounters in the opaque confines of the Ancient House, among other places, force him to recognize individual authenticity and question the reality of his containment, allowing his true subjective self to emerge, for the first time, in contrast to his identity as part of the One State. This, of course, is the only way for D-503 to capture a meaningful reality and escape the tyranny of his oppressive government.

Much of recent scholarship concerns totalitarian politics. Niculae Gheran argues that:

[The] individual is assimilated into the body of the state… conditioned to know no other master besides it. However, the long-term inescapable consequence of the marginalization of the natural and its replacement with a controlled, artificial and of course monstrous space, is in my opinion the reemergence of the natural. The eruption of suppressed individual impulses seem to temporarily provoke destabilizations of the strict geometricity of monstrous geography. It cannot be said, however, that
these fluctuations are so powerful as to cause a paradigmatic “spatial/
psychological revolution” (Gheran 2-3)

While I agree there is an emergence of the natural, it exists in terms of a subjective
experience and subsequent release of D-503’s personal identity. The character’s relation
to spatial geography evokes this emergence. The terrain of the One State, including the
construction and layout of individual homes largely creates the position of collective
identity that each cipher inherits. That identity is finally undermined when D-503 is
subjected to the environment of other monstrous geographies: the physical landscape
of the Ancient House as well as the personal space he creates within the universe of his
written texts. This space, monstrous for the individual contemplation it provokes, is the
catalyst for D-503’s inner revolution.

Bachelard’s ideas about inside and outside spaces, the experience of intimate
spaces and the objects they contain, illuminate We in this way, forcing D-503 to
reevaluate his connection to monstrous geographies that help him realize an individual
identity. To Bachelard, “…imagination augments the values of reality” in contemplating
the home as “our corner of the world,” since “all inhabited space bears the essence of the
notion of home” (4-5). Given the panoptic nature of space within Zamyatin’s One State
juxtaposed to D-503’s newfound privacy, the character’s imaginative dreams and self-
actualizing journal entries, speak directly to his intense link with intimate space.

As D-503 struggles with his changing understanding of self throughout the
course of the text, his new identity can be linked directly to the character’s experience
with intimate spaces and uncanny objects, such as the “moss, hummocks, knots, trunks,
wings, and leaves” (Zamyatin 136) in Record 27: materials possessed by “that class of
the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud 1),
in this case, D-503’s buried identity. His identity has been purposely constructed, as
ciphers are educated by the One State to understand all spaces as visible to everyone at
all times, especially agents of state control. If all spaces are equal, all ciphers must also
be equal, and the nature of that equality resides in the understanding that the Guardians, who are assumed to be always watching, creating the illusion of constant observation, would punish differences. Moreover, since the physical nature of buildings, inner chambers, and placement of bodies within these transparent spheres are represented in strict mathematical form, to deviate from the expected form in any sense is to deviate from unity itself and become an Other, placing the self at total odds with its established milieu, thus destroying the self. This is evident in several instances where ciphers behave in unexpected ways and in doing so produce chaotic repercussions, especially through the introduction of I-330 as a radical agent, as she is the catalyst to introducing D-503 to the environment of the uncanny. He is presented with unfamiliar structures and spaces that awaken something in him, especially at the Ancient House and in his experience with the forest. As in Bachelard, D-503 comes to “really revere an image… when [he] discover[s] that its roots plunge well beyond the history that is fixed in [his] memories” (33). He longs for an individual connection to these spaces, which reflect and invite an analysis of subconscious desires and basic human need for expression and excitement, in a sense, for difference. At intervals, D-503 experiences several new forms of surroundings comparable to Bachelard’s concepts of attic and basement spaces, closets, drawers, corners, and the dialectics of outside and inside spaces. Each of these experiences presents the protagonist with an opportunity for self-discovery and self-actualization, even if the fear of achieving an authentic self through these modes after life-long suppression of individuality proves detrimental to D-503’s progress outside of the collective.

**Communal and Policed Spaces**

From the onset of the novel, D-503 displays an eager connection with his controlled environment, likening the movement of the machines in the Integral hangar to humans performing a ballet. He is struck by the “beauty” of this precise and systematic
dance, a likely reflection of the ciphers of the One State performing their rigidly timed functions according to the daily schedule. D-503 places value on its “non-free movement, because the whole profound point of this dance lies precisely in its absolute, aesthetic subordination, its perfect non-freedom” (Zamyatin 6). Taylorized ritual, subjugating people of the One State to the position of mechanized beings eliminates the boundaries, differences, and individuality of each member of the society. Much like the machines, ciphers collectively perform tasks, such as waking up, starting and stopping work, even chewing food, according to a strict schedule designed to control the rhythm and structure of work output, in a sense to heighten each cipher’s value by harmonizing its energy with the best possible use of time. This unity, however ingrained in this society’s constituents, depends upon the surveillance of punishing agents responsible for administrering justice (in many cases death) to ciphers who exhibit behavior outside of the constraints of the collective norm. As the agents are largely unidentifiable, and coupled with the architectural landscape of the city, the One State becomes a panoptic environment. D-503 describes the city’s space in terms of “the immutably straight streets, the ray-spraying glass of the sidewalks, the divine parallelepipeds of the transparent buildings, and the quadratic harmony of the gray-blue ranks” (7). All space is visible, subjecting the gray-blue uniformed bodies to internalized surveillance, as they exist at the center of a glass cage. The importance of the geography of the city is evident in D-503’s interpretation of human function: the landscape itself is a marker for purpose where constant observation forces people to perform an identity fixated on and controlled by rigid mathematical form. Tall, angular structures, orderly and translucent building materials, an obvious lack of freely growing natural elements such as trees and shrubs, combined with the confining outer wall impose these same qualities on the psyches of the city’s inhabitants, as when D-503 relates “And I was like a tower, not daring to move an elbow, for fear of scattering walls, cupolas, machines…” (7). Thus, the landscape of the city becomes the geographical map of its ciphers’ minds.
The consequences of the effects of this psychogeographical exchange, or the ways in which D-503’s emotions and actions are shaped by this space, create an identity narrative in which D-503 subverts normative individual human desires and emotions. In exchange for personal identity, ciphers submit to a collective archetypal experience bound inherently to reinforcing the tyrannical totalitarianism of the One State:

“Each morning,” D-503 explains, “…with six-wheeled precision, at the exact same hour, at the exact same minute, we, the millions, rise as one. At the exact same hour, we uni-millionly start work, and uni-millionly stop work. And, merged into a single, million-handed body, at the exact same Table-appointed second, we bring spoons to our lips, we go out for our walk and go to the auditorium, to the Taylor Exercise Hall, go off to sleep” (12-13)

Both auditory and visual cues, the sleep bell ringing, the evenly dispersed rays of sunlight, or the circular rows within the auditorium as well as the unflinching perpendicular angles of walkways and staircases contribute to the strict and rigid conformity to the Table of Hours, and the precise and mechanical movements that inhabit Zamyatin’s characters. Their ordered lives are reflections of the strict order warranted by their surroundings.

The most austere example of the city’s landscape creating identity is the description of personal living spaces. Each room is a copy of every other room in the community. The equality of the ciphers exists physically in the representation of the living quarters to which they are relegated. This correlates with Bachelard’s idea that:

the related problems are many if we want to determine the profound reality of all the subtle shadings of our attachment for a chosen spot… We should therefore have to say how we inhabit our vital space, in accord with all the dialectics of life, how we take root, day after day, in a “corner of the world.” For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. (4)
Inhabitants are on display at every moment, their glass homes open spaces except when special permission is granted for “blind lowering” on Sex Days. D-503 says “We live in full view, perpetually awash with light, in among our transparent walls, woven from the sparkling air. We have nothing to hide from one another” (19). Individuals can never accomplish acts of privacy. The open blinds function as open eyes, watching and judging. As there is no escaping this panoptic space, individuals are never granted spaces to support individual expression and personal comfort. In this oppressive state, the government uses the home, constructing it as a place of “identity, of relations, of history. The layout of the house, the rules of residence…configuration of public open spaces correspond for every individual to a system of possibilities, prescriptions, and interdicts whose content is both spatial and social” (Augé 52-3). Behavior conforms to environmental control, and in this case the environment suppresses freedom.

**Intimate Spaces and the Personal Revolution**

As the novel progresses, D-503 encounters various unfamiliar localities. With each encounter of an uncanny environment, he accesses ever-deeper layers of his unconscious identity in conjunction with derived understanding produced by spatial relationship. Even at their first meeting, the character I-330 provides a disruption to D-503’s geography. As he imagines the symbiotic nature of “I” and “We” participating as building blocks in “some sort of unified, radiant, smiling matter” (7), the sound of I-330’s laughter jars D-503’s perception and confuses his daydream as well as his participation in the march. The daydream, in fact, is the original cue that alerts I-330 to D-503’s potential to become a free individual. He imagines having “conquered the old god and the old life. As if [he] had personally created all this,” (7) and thus participates in what Bachelard coins *Intimate Immensity*: “One might say that immensity is a philosophical category of daydream…through a sort of natural inclination [daydream] contemplates grandeur. And this contemplation …transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that
bears the mark of infinity” (182). Though D-503 is unable to imagine, at this juncture, an individual self-existant and capable of functioning outside the tether of the One State, the fact that he is imagining himself in a place of personal importance shows his human drive to be an individual. Bachelard posits that daydream is “original contemplation” (184), which of course is discouraged by the imposed unity of D-503’s environment, but I-330 recognizes the act as rebellious, since she is complicit in rebellious behavior. Further, she knows precisely what he is thinking without having ever spoken to him. This unsettles D-503, for it is the first time he encounters an “X,” the unknown irritant that he cannot factor into an equation. What he is actually beginning to interpret are the unknown variables within his subconscious self, surfacing through the experience of interacting with his immediate space and transposing the idea of that space as a category of his Intimate Immensity. It should be noted, too, that this experience occurs in the hangar of the Integral, which he is mostly responsible for building, and is therefore a reflection of his mental connection to the object of physical achievement.

While his confusion is immediate, it is especially sharpened by the angular composition of I-330’s body, as though her very presence was stabbing his space, his thoughts. Her teeth appear as “unusually” white, as well as “sharp,” and she is described as “unfamiliar” (7). It is telling that D-503 focuses on the quality of her sound and her body type, which by comparison to other female ciphers seems “Other,” almost animal. Her lean, wild presence is in direct contrast to the soft and round contours of O-90, and even the digits provided to the ciphers by the One State are suggestive of these differences. O-90’s curves bend, outwardly pliant to the idea of wholeness extolled by the One State and in turn D-503’s conscious imagination, while I-330’s rigid posture and half-contours suggest a sharp counter, a threat to those ideas (the original Cyrillic orthography shows the same pattern as O is represented as О and I as И). “I” is indicative, in this space, of “irrational,” as well as the personal “I,” which interrupts D-503’s experience in a familiar space, and which this society is intent on repressing.
Perhaps these archetypes present in this way because, as Bachelard relates “Being is round…. Images of full roundness help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside” (234). In fact, of all the characters in the novel, O-90 may be the one who is most convinced and most motivated by her personal truth: maternal instinct. Her feminine softness, though, is not brittle enough to force self-recognition from D-503. His repressed constitution, it seems, requires the invasion of his space by the comparative unsettling severity of I-330.

It is clear that I-330 is aware of this possibility in D-503, which is why she instructs him to visit the Ancient House. Once he is introduced to the Ancient House there is no way to deny that the repressed “X” exists within D-503’s own structure of identity. The house image indeed presents an interesting basis for analysis of his struggle with separate identities. According to Bachelard, “the house image would appear to have become a topography of our intimate being” (xxxvi). In considering Jung’s explanation of the levels of a house in relation to the mental structure of the individual, Bachelard goes further to posit that the house itself can be considered, then, “as a tool for analysis of the human soul” (xxxvii). Certainly, the scenes in which D-503 experiences the spaces within the Ancient House present the greatest opportunity for analysis of his developing psyche. It is directly due to his interaction with this space that he becomes obsessed with the idea that he may even possess a soul, which he rationalizes as a form of sickness.

D-503 and I-330 approach the Ancient House from an aero, where the protagonist faces the house and its implications from a birds-eye distance. According to Bachelard, “All great, simple images reveal a psychic state. The house, even more than the landscape, is a ‘psychic state,’ and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy” (72). In this instance in We, D-503 reports that the pair are flying in a:

May sky of blue majolica…the light sun in its own golden aero, buzzing along behind us [which is interrupted by] a cloud whitening our view like a cataract, stupid and puffy, like the cheeks of the ancient Cupid…
then a slight, involuntary sinking of the heart – down, down, down, like descending a steep hill – and we were at the Ancient House (Zamyatin 24). This can be read as a psychic interpretation of the relationship D-503 already imagines in connection with the space of the house. If “verticality [of the house] is ensured by the polarity of the cellar and attic, the marks of which are so deep that, in a way, they open up two very different perspectives for a phenomenology of the imagination” (Bachelard 17), I suggest that in this instance D-503’s experience represents an unconscious maneuver to psychically mimic the action of entering a house laden with historical and sociological value by moving from the clarity of his conscious thought into an attempt to access his unconscious attitudes. The description of the sky functions in connection with his clear identity, crystalline and illuminated, much like Bachelard’s suggestion that “in the attic, it is a pleasure to see the bare rafters of the strong framework” (18). The closer the two get to the house, the more mottled that framework, and the framework of D-503’s mind becomes. The basement is “first and foremost the dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of its depths” (18). As D-503 approaches the ground in order to enter the depths of the house, he is accessing the irrational unconscious, descending through a fog that prohibits him from either seeing or thinking clearly.

Once in the recesses of the house, D-503 experiences the chaotic force of the ancient apartment, with all its secret spaces and uncanny objects:

I opened the heavy, creaky, opaque door and we were in a dark, disorderly space (they call this an “apartment”). There stood that strange, “grand” musical instrument, amid the wild, disorganized, crazy multicolor of tones and shapes – like that ancient music. White smoothness overhead; dark blue walls; the red, green, orange bindings of ancient books; the yellow bronze of a candelabra and a statue of Buddha; and the lines created by the furniture all mangled by that epilepsy, not adhering to any sort of equation (Zamyatin 25).
The chaos of this scene is a precursor to the crisis of identity that D-503 is about to experience as he gazes on his image in the mirror. His senses are assaulted by the space, and colors jump out at him in a kaleidoscope of images that he at once rushes to interpret and dismiss. As he notes each unusual color and distinctive item, the space taken up by those objects becomes separate, somewhat fractured from the wholeness of the apartment. And as each space is fractured, so too are D-503’s thoughts as he moves to connect with each item he encounters. Like the lines of the furniture within the room, his sense of self is becoming mangled as he attempts to understand the landscape and his place within it. While the dizzying array of color and the implied tonality of the “ancient music” (a seemingly discordant piano) project an outward representation of D-503’s inner chaos, the door to the apartment presents an even more conspicuous relationship to the environment. In Bachelard’s idea, a door is significant as a marker:

"Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of yes and no, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, it is made into a basis of images that govern all thoughts of positive and negative…in terms of being and non-being (211-12)."

When D-503 decides to enter through the opaque door, he is symbolically choosing to become part of his nation’s history by accepting its space as worthy of attention and reflection. He is what Augé would refer to as an “anthropologist of the near.” His decision instigates a relationship with the room, but also with the mythology of its prior inhabitants, a hearkening back to the individuality celebrated by a prior age. The door is not simply a division between the apartment and the One State, but the dividing factor between D-503’s identity as imposed by the teachings of the One State and his own personal identity or what he might refer to as rational/irrational.

This crisis culminates a brief moment later when D-503 encounters a mirror. He states, “Aren’t human beings constructed as haphazardly as these apartments? Human
heads aren’t transparent, and their only tiny windows: the eyes” (26). Here, Zamyatin
anticipates Bachelard’s use of the house as a metaphor for human identity. As D-503
begins to formulate an understanding of himself, his body, and the way his identity relates
to the construction of the Ancient House, he also comes to an important discovery:

Before me were two terrifyingly dark windows, and within them a very
unknown, strange life. I could only see fire… It was only natural of
course: I had seen a reflection of myself. But, in fact it was so unnatural
and unlike me, that I felt frightened…a captive in this wild cage, I felt
gripped by the wild whirlwind of ancient life (26).

The “depressing effects of the circumstances” (26), or the negation of his former
identity through his acceptance of the house, its contents, and his place among them have
allowed him to bear witness to an awakening. No longer subject to the panoptic gaze in
this private space, he has the freedom to gaze upon himself. The reflection of his own
eyes, the “windows to the soul,” and their unfamiliar gaze in return alert the viewer that
he has a split self, a previously unrecognized nature with which he does not identify. His
former self deteriorates under his gaze, paradoxically, he becomes an individual. This
could never have been achieved in the transparent landscape of the One State.

**Beyond the Green Wall**

While D-503’s contact with the Ancient House demonstrates the ability of space
and place to reveal identity, these transformations transcend the private spaces, mirrors,
rooms, and doors of the apartments. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that
Bachelard’s premise can be extended beyond the house, into nature. Zamyatin exposes
nature as an interruption to D-503’s psyche. Zamyatin’s novel treats the natural world
with suspicion and even disgust. There is no place for nature in the sleek, stylized,
pristine landscape of the One State; its faultless glass architecture and perfect machinery
are directly at odds with the thrumming chaos of life beyond the Green Wall. The most
obvious objective of this separation between man and nature is to delineate between a Taylorized, structured society that dehumanizes the individual and the power of nature to resist that control. Because the space beyond the Green Wall cannot be contained or subdued, it presents a threat to the Totalitarian system. Nature is at liberty to live as it pleases, a frightening prospect for leaders who depend on complete submission and D-503. When presented with the opportunity to engage with the freedom that nature embodies, D-503 both venerates and reviles it.

In a recent article exploring the link between nature and human liberty in George Orwell’s 1984, which was heavily influenced by Zamyatin’s We, Piers Stephens notes that “1984 shares with radical environmentalism a protest against the modern ethos of separation of subject and object, of estrangement and disconnection from our fellow humans and from the natural world” (79). This estrangement is, of course, evident in We and particularly in D-503’s personal encounter with the space beyond the Green Wall. His first foray into the wild space outside the artificial environment of the One State bewilders him, as Record 27 decrees, “No key words are possible” (Zamyatin 135). D-503’s inability to produce a title for his experience is indicative of the deep-rooted psychic interruption produced by the encounter. The wild space represented by nature begins to shape an erratic pattern of thinking:

My first thought was: quick, go back, fast as you can. It was clear that while I had been waiting in the corridor, they had somehow blown up and destroyed the Green Wall and everything had darted over and swamped our city, which until now had been unsoiled with that lower world (135). The thought is illogical, since he has been waiting mere seconds and has simply crossed the barrier into the forest, but his irrationality shows his belief in the danger represented by nature. It is a “lower world” that corrupts and invades, rather than a retreat or an escape. There is a sense that because it cannot be conquered, subdued, it does not belong. As he begins to identify with nature, embracing its freedom, his identification within the
system of the One State is interrupted.

His new idea of nature could potentially undermine his role in society. He could abandon his lifelong home for the open space of the forest and sexual freedom with I-330, yet this conflicts with D-503’s experience of safety and comfort. He does not consider the people beyond the Wall to be of the same species, is afraid of attempting to taste a banana, and believes the fragmented sun of the forest to be a different sun. Though he celebrates the idea of the collective within the pre-ordained definitions supplied by his controlling government he is so far removed from the concept of all humans as hereditary ancestors and a freely shared community that he resents the very freedom he finds beautiful. Piers’s discussion of 1984 continues to provide some insight:

Whereas evolutionary nature provides grounds for human collective identity - that is, other humans and creatures for us to be related to and differentiated from in the stream of living existence – a postnatural world would rip us asunder from the regularity and the coherence that makes freedom meaningful (94).

I would argue also that D-503’s contact with the natural spaces outside the postnatural mechanisms of the One State undermines this entrenched disdain of freedom. The Green space has a transformative power that encourages D-503 to “go crazy,” and to accept his individuality. After surveying the natural landscape for the first time D-503 finally acknowledges his separateness:

In a blink I am somewhere up high and underneath me are heads and heads, and gaping, screaming mouths, and arms pouring upwards and then falling. This was exceptionally strange, intoxicating. I felt myself above everything, I was myself, a separate thing, a world; I stopped being a component, as I had been, and I became the number one (138).

As in the Ancient House, the chaotic nature of the natural environment forces D-503 to question his subjectivity. Here, the power of nature, though “strange and intoxicating,”
transforms him, allowing him to emerge from the limitations of the closed and monitored spaces of the One State that forbade the recognition of a singular identity. Though he will eventually reject this individuality, the importance nature plays in forming his competing identities cannot be overlooked. He will use this encounter as a basis for performing a rebellion against the oppressiveness of his controlled space. While he will ultimately obtain the operation that will terminate his brief freedom, his written account of the immensity of his feelings in the forest serves as evidence of transformation.

**Text as Intimate Space**

D-503 develops a competing identity based on his interaction with physical spaces throughout the novel, but he is simultaneously creating a realm of private space in which to explore and define these competing identities. As he discovers his soul and contemplates its existence as well as its relevance, he creates a world of text with which he has intimate contact controlled by his honest reporting as well as secretive ownership. Like the private world contained within the spaces of the Ancient House, D-503’s journals become a museum housing the history of his transformation. Bachelard notes:

> Words… are little houses, each with its cellar and garret. Common-sense lives on the ground floor… on the same level as the passers-by. To go upstairs in the word house, is to withdraw, step by step; while to go down to the cellar is to dream, it is losing oneself in the distant corridors of an obscure etymology, looking for treasures that cannot be found in words (147).

In constructing this landscape of words, D-503 visually represents in text his participation in and with the outer landscape. At two points in particular, D-503 sees the text as representative of his competing selves. He early recognizes his contending identity narratives: “This text is me; and simultaneously not me” (4). The text is an easier landscape for D-503’s logical mind to navigate, as Bachelard suggests “Sight says too many things at one time. Being does not see itself. Perhaps it listens to itself. It does not
stand out, it is not bordered by nothingness: one is never sure of finding it, or of finding it solid, when one approaches a center of being” (215). The combined records of his experiences create a border that D-503 can use to mark the progression of his emerging individuality. Consequently, D-503 is perplexed later in reviewing I-330’s accusation that he probably has “a few drops of sunny forest blood in [him]“ (Zamyatin 169). He is unable to conclude whether this accusation of his biological connection to the wild forest is accurate, stating, “No, fortunately it is not gibberish. No, unfortunately it is not gibberish” (169), and this, I believe, is evident of his struggle to adapt to the reality of his competing identities, outlined in a private space he has created through his own words. His pages of text, like those of the Gazette he initially quotes in the novel, recreate a traceable version of his subjective experiences with his outside environment. There is no denying the existence of his soul, and therefore his differences from other members of the One State, if one follows his pattern of behaviors through the landscape of his text. His reflective writing is both an agent of control and rebellion. D-503 forms a relationship with himself through the space of his writing that merges, probes, and recreates his unique identities, but also complicates them through the act of reading, both his own words and those of the State Gazette (a space specifically designed by the One State in order to advertise the virtue of participation in their proposed structure of identity).

D-503’s development through the course of his records is visible in the shifting patterns of his writing. In the beginning, he copies “word-for-word” an excerpt from the state paper. These words are made possible by the One State and conceived for the purpose of propagating the totalitarian regime. Not only does the government “employ the word” as it might employ weapons, it requires the ciphers to employ words in the form of compositions that would laud this practice. So, textual space gives the One State agency for control on two levels: they tell readers what to think and they force the type of response required, a written record of the perfection the State has achieved which it will then use to subjugate all other beings on other planets. D-503 is emotionally affected by
his decision to write for the Integral and feels “what a woman experiences when she first hears a new pulse within her…a…mini being” (4). He is inhabited by the very idea of this space. As in Bachelard, it becomes the “germ of a room,” or to clarify even further,

The image offered to us by reading…becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it…It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses… [It] creates being (xxiii).

This idea of expressing the self, or creating a being through the space of the text works two ways in *We*. The power of the State lies in the rhetoric it uses to condition its constituents by its supposed logic, as in the beginning of the novel when D-503 is seduced by the words of the Gazette. D-503’s own writing, however, helps him to create a private space outside of the One State’s influence, thus prompting his revolution.

As D-503’s narrative progresses, ellipses become frequent examples of the importance of what is not said. When the mathematical unity of his world was most prevalent in his writing, it was littered with dashes that connected his ideas in a streamlined way, acting as a formula. But as he becomes the “other” D-503 he is searching for truth. Those truths threaten his existence, and so he must not connect them logically, but only infer them without utterance. The ellipses are representative of a non-space, since once the words are said, they are solid. They inhabit a room and cannot be taken back. As the words are signifiers that he is living a lie, D-503 denies their truth by leaving those thoughts unfinished. Since questions are both deemed unnecessary and not permitted by the State, the idea that he questions at all is evidence of change. These question marks also occupy an in-between space: an examination of the truth of lines that are written into the textual landscape, without either proving or negating their validity. Both ellipses and question marks provide temporal disruptions to the space of the text, forcing the reader to imagine outside of the space in which he or she is cognitively connected. Augé says “Place is completed through the word, through the allusive
exchange of a few passwords between speakers who are conniving in private complicity” (77), but the omission of words also creates a place within the space of the text, whereby writer and reader are complicit in a narrative of assumption. Unfinished and implicit thoughts in D-503’s narrative suggest either his inability to accept the progression of his identity, or the refusal to submit to his soul’s desire for intimacy with his private environment or with I-330. As he questions his progression in his textual space, so the reader is forced to do the same.

The keywords preceding each chapter reflect this transformation. During the most crucial discovery, D-503 refuses to give the chapter keywords in what seems like an effort to deny the existence of his “other” self. Key words represent components of an “analytical space … a transitional space, that is to say… a liminal or threshold space, situated on the borders between inside and outside, external reality and psychic reality, a space of illusion, creativity and being” (Connoly 179). In other words, the space of the text offers a private place for the development of a personal identity not permitted by the One State. His analysis of the self changes when D-503 is surprised by the person he sees in the mirror, finally recognizing his consciousness as separate both from his body and ultimately from the machine of the One State. The remainder of the novel is a struggle between accepting his freedom and individuality (chaos) and reveling in the uniformity and order and “safety” of the State. When he finally does succumb to the Operation, the only way the state can assume control is to remove his ability to create. If he cannot reason creatively, composing his own textual world, then he cannot resist. It is reading the words in the Gazette that spark the possibility of not having to be responsible for his guilt in “feeling” (being sick with a soul), “The Guardians see you and your smiles and sighs with increasing frequency… But it is not your fault: You are sick. The name of this sickness: Imagination” (Zamyatin 157). Subsequently, once he is cured of his imagination and back in harmony with the State, it is no longer necessary for him to write and the story ends. Since he no longer recalls the power of the Ancient House, that identity is
subverted and replaced by his connection to the landscape that houses the protocols of the One State. Bachelard suggests, “The house is physically inscribed within us. It is a group of organic habits” (14). These habits are erased from D-503; without the power of his imagination, the strength of his daydream, the connection to his intimate space the One State regains control of him. Without the protection of his private space, his “germ of a room,” his individual identity is lost.

Conclusion

A reading of outer and inner space in Zamyatin’s *We* can draw many connections between space and psyche: the auditorium, the Integral hangar and the Integral itself, and the basement of the Ancient House among them. These spaces house memories and emotions. Bachelard mentions lines from Rilke that may accentuate this: “House, patch of meadow, oh evening light/ Suddenly you acquire an almost human face/ You are very near us, embracing and embraced” (Bachelard 8). The house, and all the intimate spaces it provides within it, as well as the intimate geographies that constitute its surroundings, influence D-503 in a profound way that can be especially noted in the fact that he sends O-90 into the refuge of the forest carrying his child, an act he would never have considered prior to his experience in the forest. This one act of rebellion will ensure D-503’s survival as an individual since his heir will go on to live in the relative safety and freedom of the natural environment, never subject to removal from his natural mother or to the Operation. Other characters respond to this spatial relationship as well, most notably in the cases of I-330, who follows a similar pattern to that of D-503, and of O-90, who seems to be the only character who actually does reconcile her individual needs against the will of the One State when she purposely conceives a child without a license and then flees with it to live beyond the Green Wall.

One significant query that arises through D-503’s personal narrative can be discussed in relation to Augé’s ideas concerning ethnology and perspective in his chapter
“Near and Elsewhere”: “It is obvious to anyone who has done fieldwork that ethnological inquiry has limitations which are also assets… it is a matter of being able to assess what the people we see and speak to tell us about the people we do not see and speak to” (12-13). Since D-503 constructs his textual world from his singular perspective, the reader is forced to identify only with his point of view; however, because there is more than one D-503 after he acquires knowledge of his intimate self, the narrative becomes complicated. Where his original bias against ancient people is pronounced, after his contact with their objects within the space of the apartment, as well as his foray into the natural world that resides beyond the Green Wall, he is eager to embrace their “primitive” culture. Although, in the end, this is not what occurs, certainly the fact that D-503 becomes optimistically engaged with nature is worth consideration. Perhaps there is something to be said for objects and spaces containing or instigating a sort of racial memory that forges a link between past and present generations.

In any case, D-503’s encounters with the geographies of the One State versus the intimate spaces he inhabits provide an arena for self-discovery. His subconscious identity emerges in tandem with his exploration of uncanny environments and objects. The identity created by his excursions into the Ancient House as well as the universe of space he creates through his text serve to challenge not only the oppressive landscape of the One State, but their ideas as well. The privacy of the Ancient House apartment, with its dark corners, opaque doors, and especially its closed windows contradicts the edict of panoptic space, encouraging freedom and self expression, in effect encouraging individual growth. It is only within these spaces that D-503 is actually free, so it is only within them that he can be fully human.
CHAPTER III. PARADISE AFTER THE APOCALYPSE: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN WHEN THE LIZARDS KEEP TRYING TO EAT YOU

Northrop Frye notes the tendency of the Romantic period’s literature to move away from religion and towards science stating: “An apocalyptic vision of a day when the sun would be turned into darkness and the moon into blood had to give place to a science which turned the sun into a blast furnace and the moon into a stone” (11). If the Romantic period paved the way for this discussion of ecological disaster, SF artists of the New Wave, such as Ballard furthered this image, especially in his depiction of life after Earth’s ozone is decimated. In The Drowned World, language and imagery move away from a romantic view of the sun to a scientific perspective where characters must reevaluate their relationships with the Earth’s resources, which have become dangerous and alien. While Zamyatin’s We is politically motivated, Ballard’s novel also suggests political undertones in his narrator’s hint that the changed landscape came about as a “sudden instability in the sun” (21), suggesting, perhaps, some sort of human contribution. Cyndy Hendershot has analyzed Science Fiction’s tendency to concern itself with cultural trauma in the aftermath of WWII, suggesting that:

Trauma is that which is painfully experienced but which cannot be adequately translated into language or even translated at all. According to psychoanalysts J. Laplanche and G.B. Pontalis, trauma can be defined as “an event in the subject’s life defined by its intensity, by the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization” (465). Trauma, however, can also be experienced at a cultural level, and as Cathy Caruth observes in her introduction to a collection of essays on this topic, trauma
“does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (151). Thus trauma could be described as a past that is inarticulable as a present reality (74).

The traumatic circumstances of Ballard’s novel present the possibility of a post-Apocalyptic reality based on contemporary concerns regarding climate change and other environmental issues. Ballard explains the crucial need to address these issues in his fiction:

I’ve always been interested in the ecological aspects of life on this planet. Coming from a very dramatic part of the world, a place with war, floods, and all the rest of it, I’ve always felt that people living in the cosy suburbia of Western Europe and America never appreciated just how vulnerable we were to climatic disasters (Ballard, “About the Author” 3).

At the time Ballard produced _The Drowned World_, international society was just embarking on a movement towards criticizing the role of humans and their effects on the environment. Rachel Carson’s _Silent Spring_ was published during the same year, and both texts are evidence of the modern environmental movement’s concern with humankind’s place and responsibility in caring for the environment. For Sherryl Vint, Ballard’s works perform a “deeply divergent latent meaning, with surreal results that in turn indicate the peculiarity of a world constructed and experienced through powerful public discourses and one’s own psychological flux” (Bould and Vint 113). It is logical that Ballard would employ this strategy of correlating real-life environmental concerns with the fictional environmental future in _The Drowned World_, where contemporary issues serve as a backdrop for his exploration of human behavior.

Changes in environmental space and place, and the bodily and psychological responses tied to them, became increasingly important in Western literature with the advent of the nuclear bomb. It seems obvious to say that new technologies would bring about new ways of interpreting human identity, but post-WWII reactions seem to reimagine the relationship between humans and the environment, and humans
and themselves in ways previously overlooked. The body’s response to traumatic environments becomes increasingly important, as does the interior space of the mind. In an interview with Travis Elborough, Ballard discusses the influence of his own experiences in Shanghai on *The Drowned World*, noting that the novel’s preoccupation with social regression and de-evolution stems from [his wartime experience] when he saw, first hand, how easily the veneer of civilization could slip away (Ballard, “About” 2). His own experiences show that the reality of living conditions under which the human subject is forced to encounter an unfamiliar connection to place and space then produces a peculiar response. In watching the degradation of human interaction in Shanghai as a response to the environmental circumstances, whether within the closed spaces of the camp that had become his home or the larger-scale devastation of countries at war, Ballard witnessed a tension between inner and outer environments that reflected an intrinsic struggle to perform and embody identity appropriate to one’s place in his or her environment, later reflected in the characters of *The Drowned World*.

The title of his first chapter, “On the Beach at the Ritz,” may sound like anyone’s dream vacation, but this is unrecognizable landscape, a nightmarish scenario. Ruined, submerged buildings populate the space, while “massive fronds” that “crowd the roofs” (Ballard 7) show nature as something both powerful and grotesque. Plants are more than 60-ft high, replacing man-made structures as the dominant feature of the landscape. Violent heat storms are the only mechanism that can topple these plants; humans no longer control them. In a world where “water would seem to burn” (Ballard 7), the landscape threatens the way humans perceive necessary and vital elements, changing the relationship of the human to its natural environment to one of fear. Even the power of the sun becomes “relentless” as it “turn[s] the dead leaden surface of the lagoon into a copper shield”(Ballard 7), making the landscape one large reflective surface that emits formidable heat. The landscape becomes an instrument of human discomfort and offers Kerans, the scientific observer, an opportunity for introspection: what is now his
relationship with this catastrophic landscape, and what type of human does this create? From his balcony at the Ritz, Kerans discovers a “Strange, mournful beauty hung over the lagoon…‘intruders’ from the Triassic past…the two interlocking worlds apparently suspended at some junction in time, the illusion momentarily broken when a giant waterspider cleft the oily surface a hundred yards away” (Ballard 10). This new world suggests a duality in the natural landscape, juxtaposing the quiet beauty of the lagoon against the proximity of its threatening inhabitants. Moreover, it places both of these ideas against the memory of human architectural achievement. As in D-503’s encounter with the world beyond the Green Wall, Kerans is experiencing the transformative effect of an encroaching nature. Nature has become the “predatory insect” (10) that feeds on man’s creation and destroys his place in the system. Instead of occupying a place of dominance man is now displaced by nature.

As a scientist on an expedition mapping the flooded remains of long-submerged European cities, Kerans is witnesses the age of man, civilization, and culture coming to a close. In his observations, he estimates that nature has subverted the significance man once had on the environment as it becomes harder to tame and even harder to survive in. The job of “biological mapping” that he and Bodkins perform “had become a pointless game” (Ballard 8). Kerans no longer has the drive to go to work, instead rationalizing his choice to ignore his responsibility and instead stay in the cooler, confined, and protective spaces of his commandeered rooms at the abandoned Ritz. While it is evident that the Ritz’s lavish furnishings employ a richness that can no longer be preserved as the water level rises, Kerans insists on accepting the rich background of art, color, and décor as a “natural background to his existence” (Ballard 9). His acceptance of man-made environments as natural despite its inevitable ruin suggests, as Bachelard denotes, the human propensity to relate oneself to the spaces of the house:

Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor.

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It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates on being within limits that protect (xxxvii).

Kerans is fascinated by this space, “savouring the subtle atmosphere of melancholy that surrounded these last vestiges of a level of civilization now virtually vanished forever” (Ballard 10). The privacy and protection of this dwelling gives him solace from the outside world, while simultaneously allowing him a connection to his heritage. Like D-503’s Ancient House in We, the contents of the Ritz’s rooms supply a generous reconstruction of the life of humans before the circumstances of the disaster: “the cupboards and wardrobes were packed with treasure, ivory-handled squash rackets and hand-printed dressing gowns” and “gilt end-tables” as well as a “crocodile-skin desk” (Ballard 10). Kerans contemplates these objects with a satisfaction he lacks when considering the chaos outside. The items in the rooms, tangible relics left over from a time when humans created order instead of merely attempting to survive are proof of a reliable reality against the fluctuating temperatures outside. Compared to Bachelard’s description of Carre-Benoit’s oak filing cabinet whose “proportions were what they should be, everything about it had been designed and calculated by a meticulous mind for the purposes of utility,” (77) Kerans’s furniture offers the same sense of purpose, but also beyond that a sense of beauty due to its impermanence; an ornate, “sleek” beauty that offers a contrast to the otherwise devastated space.

While these artifacts as well as the cities that encapsulate them generate interest Kerans as a scientist, they fail to provide a basis for attachment to them through specific memories since he has no living experience of them. He was born into the drowned world and never knew the cities prior to their demise, so “the vast swamps and jungles had been a fabulous laboratory, the submerged cities little more than elaborate pedestals” (Ballard 21). For Kerans, who has no childhood connection, no real understanding of these places outside of surveying their geographical locations, these locales exist as what
Augé terms non-places, “a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity…” (77). Kerans is unsure even of which city he is surveying and shares no physical bond of history with any environment outside Camp Byrd. Still, as Augé discusses further: “in some form or another some experience of non-place…is… an essential component of all social existence. Hence the very particular and ultimately paradoxical character of what is sometimes regarded in the West as ‘cocooning’, retreating into the self” (119). Perhaps this is the reason Kerans rejects his superior officer Riggs’s decision to leave the lagoon. Now that he has spent six months becoming used to an environment that tangibly supports human life he is formulating a sense of identity in connection to his environment. On the surface it seems that this idea, as well as his connection with his neighbor Beatrice, are the major factors motivating Kerans to stay in the lagoon; however, there is a quieter revolution occurring underneath this drive. In Bea’s apartment, Kerans begins to note similarities linking his environment to that of the Max Ernst painting on the wall which portrays “self-devouring phantasmagoric jungles scream[ing] silently to itself, like the sump of some insane unconscious…a curious feeling of memory and recognition signaling through his brain,” especially in the context of the “image of the archaic sun” (Ballard 29). As he comes into contact with these domestic items with which he is unfamiliar, much like in D-503’s experience with the whimsical apartment in We, his subconscious is provoked into strange territory. The “miniature universe” (Bachelard 150) of the painting foreshadows what will ultimately be the major transformation that leads to Kerans’s drive to flee into the phantasmagoric jungles of the south, leaving behind the uncanny landscape of the lagoon in favor of becoming a “new Adam.”

**Living on Two Levels**

Once Kerans decides to stay behind when the military unit departs for Camp Byrd, he gains a prolonged isolation and freedom from co-workers and the constraints of his
job. The subsequent time is spent contemplating what he has learned from Bodkin about his own psyche. Bodkin asserts that due to the shift in the Earth’s geography, people are suffering “a total reorientation of the personality,” “recollecting in [their] unconscious minds the landscapes of each epoch, each with a distinct geological terrain” as they “re-enter the amnionic corridor and move back through spinal and archeopsychic time” (Ballard 44). In Bodkin’s view humans are undergoing a psychogeographical exchange: as the environment regresses, humans are de-evolving. Kerans immediately accepts this idea as the most valid reason for his own metamorphosis, at this point represented by lucid and absurd daydreams. Here, Bachelard’s theory is noticeable in action:

The house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind. The binding principle of this integration is the daydream. Past, present, and future give the house different dynamisms…In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being (6-7).

Interestingly, as Kerans, Hardman, and Beatrice Dahl begin to experience communal dreams, Riggs, the only one with memory of the landscape before it became devastated, does not seem to be regressing. Because he is able to formulate a tangible relationship to places as he uncovers them on their mapping expeditions, libraries, museums, even merely abstract locations that at least have a name, such as London or Italy, enable him to orient himself through remembrance of that geography. For the rest who cannot rely on the same familiarity with the landscape the immense water becomes a substitute. According to Bachelard’s idea that “inhabited space transcends geometrical space” (47) water acts as a structure representative of the only home these characters have known, or as Beatrice describes “the drowned world of [her] uterine childhood,” a womblike structure which implies, by its very nature, a “going back,” which I shall discuss further in terms of Kerans transformation later in this essay. It is crucial to note,
however, that “this change in concrete space can no longer be a mere mental operation that could be compared with consciousness of geometrical relativity,” as Bachelard asserts, since “…we do not change place, we change our nature” (206).

While Kerans arrives at this second nature somewhat slowly, Hardman eagerly accepts his new role, abandoning the unit and escaping south. The challenge of finding him, however, alerts Kerans to his own psychic understanding of Hardman’s desires; he seems to know precisely where Hardman is going and why though the idea had not previously occurred to him. The drive to go south, though the temperatures are constantly rising, the only possible conclusion to the journey resulting in death, is implicit in Kerans after his acceptance that the world is regressing. As Bodkin suggests, people seem to be corresponding with a drive to revert to an earlier type of human whose identity is tied to his or her responsiveness to an environmental impulse directed by nature and tied particularly to the sun, or the “sun: pulse equation” (Ballard 73). This new understanding of human purpose suggests not only a mere social regression, but also an instinctual desire to shed completely the communal way of living humans have adapted. In his discussion of anthropological place, Augé says it “is a principle of meaning for the people who live in it, and also a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it” (52). Combining this premise with Bodkin’s assessment of “neuronic time” (Ballard 44), whereby the human nervous system acts as a signifier for the entire history of biological time, it is evident that humans in the novel are accessing earlier anthropological history in accordance with the way the environment is reverting to its earlier state.

In short, the environment is changing humans: as the buildings crumble, so does the veneer of constructed civilization. The sociological implications, the meaning derived from contact with those buildings, are being replaced by new meanings derived from ancient memories inscribed in “organic memories…in the face of a sudden physico-chemical crisis” (Ballard 43). Climatic reversal forces the characters to access biological memories of the Triassic past. Isolation and introspection now serve as the chief drives
for behavior, a return to those dense, hot jungles suggestive of a deeper connection to
the natural environment than that of the man-made structures once so crucial to human
creativity, but even more so survival from the elements. Hardman is aware of the dangers
of traveling south and is armed with very little in the way of supplies or sustenance. He
could easily survive on the rig or at Camp Byrd, but his connection to the structures,
both physical and mental, designated by a society that functioned on a level different
from this society have been inverted with the change in ecology. This new period of
life, constructed by nature to resemble a period in time when, anthropologically, man’s
dominance has been subverted, eliminates the need for such structures, and thus such
attitudes. Bachelard has stated that “the cosmos molds mankind…the house remolds
man,” (47), but here, it is nature that shapes the changing identities of The Drowned
World’s inhabitants. Kerans does not have to think long when asked to assess where he
thinks Hardman might have gone, iterating that though south would surely “fry” him,
“there isn’t any other direction” (Ballard 57), since his own reliance on the natural
environment is now innate.

Kerans’ own identity begins its metamorphosis after Hardman’s escape from the
lagoon, as it becomes clear that escape can be possible for him as well. The daydreams
become more persistent, transforming into the more substantive communal dreams shared
by Hardman, Beatrice, and Bodkin. No longer the absurd waking visions of odd social
interactions, the dreams incur a psychic connection between Kerans and the environment,
as he feels “beating within him like his own pulse, the powerful mesmeric pull of the
baying reptiles” howling at the sun and the ubiquitous water which “seemed like an
extension of his own bloodstream. As the dull pounding rose, he felt the barriers which
divided his own cells from the surrounding medium dissolving” (Ballard 71). Since he
has no protection of enclosed, intimate space that would allow him the freedom and
safety of repose, water takes the place of the buildings and rooms that once provided
shelter. This new environment calls for a restructuring of the idea of home, and water
becomes the obvious choice with a human’s physiological attachment as the driving force for the connection. Moreover, in order to survive in this new landscape, Kerans must embrace the animal nature present in his ancestral memory. The water serves as his metaphorical connection to other bodies – bodies of reptiles whose survival has been ensured by their ability to adapt to nature’s whims. This is not the same skeptical medical officer, once reluctant to leave the air-conditioned rooms of the Ritz, prone to afternoon cocktails and lavish vintage 19th-century plush carpeting. As a scientific observer of the landscape, he, from the balconies of his apartment once decried the intolerable heat and deadly channels of the lagoons rife with murderous wildlife eager to consume him. This is a new Kerans, whose dreams place him in the position of unity with the natural environment rather than against it. He sees the lagoon from the perspective of an animal, completely at ease in, even at one with the murky water, which has become an element of comfort rather than of hostility. His pulse resonates in time with the “beating” of the sun, so that he begins to measure his existence not by his own heartbeat, but in relationship to this outside phenomenon. Kerans’ relationship with this outside space has gained the notion of intimate immensity. Bachelard remarks, “Outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility” (217-8). In this way, Kerans has exchanged his prior attachment with the inside space of the hotel, once in itself vast and protective, relocating his body to an intimate connection with outside space. This marks a transgression of normative social behavior, eschewing his place in the social system. Though he persists in resisting for a short time, “living on two levels,” he can no longer fit into the carefully constructed social order imposed by Riggs, the military, or the remnants of structured life offered at Camp Byrd. Rather, his identification with the lizards and the waters in his dreams will lead him to reassess his identity, forming a new psychology that will enable Kerans to adjust to life outside of what he might consider, as D-503’s One State in We offers a model, a “tyrannical” lifestyle that stifles the “absolute freedom he required for himself” (Ballard 81) to progress as an
individual within this newly discovered natural environment.

Like D-503’s internal revolution brought on by the uncanny space within the Ancient House, Kerans’ relationship with this new environment has forced him to reconsider his own nature. He gains a fresh sense of subjectivity in contrast to the personality he exhibits when acting as medical officer before the communal dreams begin. After his escape from Riggs, joined by Beatrice and Bodkin, Kerans notes, “the unity of the group would not long be maintained… they were entering a new zone, where the usual obligations and allegiances ceased to operate” (Ballard 81). The group separates, meeting instead in their communal dreams as they share the internalized pulsation of the sun. For weeks they live alone and in silence, immersing themselves in a regiment of reposed listening and watching as the stifling temperatures rise and vegetation takes over the lagoon. Their actions begin to resemble that of the lizards: constantly still, constantly gazing, almost basking in the heat as “the light drummed against [their] brain[s], bathing the submerged levels below [their] consciousness, carrying [them] downwards into warm pellucid depths where the nominal realities of time and space ceased to exist” (Ballard 83). Though the jungle still maintains some inherent quality of danger, it ceases to be a territory of revulsion for Kerans: rather, it possesses a sublime beauty, “filling him with an exquisite and tender anguish” (Ballard 83). His transformation is yet incomplete, as he must still occupy a room in a decrepit building, and still maintains a symbolic understanding of his and Beatrice’s roles as potential stand-ins for Adam and Eve, but it is clear that all three of them relish their freedom to descend backwards through time and space. This becomes most obvious during the arrival of Strangman, who presents a challenge to their group de-evolution when he offers them a monstrous comparison to their newfound identities.

**Monstrous Geography, Monstrous Man**

In *We*, D-503’s environment is consumed by the imposing rigid geometricity
of the One State’s planned architecture, representative of the power and force of the
government, forcing a constant psychogeographical impulse for order and obeisance. In
the landscape of Kerans’ lagoon in *The Drowned World*, however, this experience has
been reversed. The natural elements of the jungle’s ecosystem eliminate the rigidness
of a community defined by streets and buildings, covering them from view. Water has
consumed these images, dense plant-life and a spectrum of enormous predators have
reversed man’s place in the previously assumed chain of being. Kerans and his associates
have become more focused on the connection between their conscious existences and their
surroundings than on any desire to emerge a social identity. Their interpretation of human
function comes as a result of their harmony with the landscape, or what Bachelard would
call a “cogito of emergence,” though at first Kerans was repulsed by it. Bachelard recounts
Richard Hughes’s story of a young girl who realizes that she is herself after she has
emerged from her “house,” a boat that she was playing in; she becomes self-aware after
“escaping from space” (138-139). Kerans is also emerging from the “corner of his being,”
when he begins to recognize the lagoon as part of his biological identity, and as beautiful:

   endless tides of silt had begun to accumulate in enormous glittering
   banks…like the immense tippings of [a] gold mine. The light drummed
against his brain, bathing the submerged levels below his consciousness,
carrying him downwards...through the emergent past, through a
succession of ever stranger landscapes, centred upon the lagoon, each of
which…seemed to represent one of his own spinal levels. At times the
circle of water was spectral and vibrant…the soft beaches would glow
invitingly…filling him with an exquisite and tender anguish (Ballard 83).

Once Strangman arrives with his ambition to drain the lagoon and plunder the drowned
artifacts, any resistance Kerans still harbored against his newly emerging self is
extinguished.

   Strangman’s marked difference from both his crew and Kerans’ small trio of
survivors helps to solidify Kerans’ changing understanding of his place in the world. His pale skin, elaborate dress, and obsession with salvaging material treasures of the Second Millennium highlight the absurdity of a material existence in a Mesozoic landscape. With temperatures approaching two hundred degrees, Strangman’s psychotic and violent behavior emphasize that human greed is a more destructive force than that of the changing natural elements. In all the time Bea, Bodkin, and Kerans are living together at the lagoon, the natural environment never inherently threatens their lives so long as they take reasonable measures to adapt to the elements. Strangman, however, poses a natural threat to their lives in his quest to destroy the lagoon and take ownership of both material items housed by ruined buildings as well as Bea, Bodkin, and Kerans in terms of authority. Strangman has not changed in conjunction with the changing environment, and in acting outside of its new laws, becomes distinctly separate from it. His alien attitude and behavior threatens the existence of the lagoon and all its inhabitants, including the people. His resistance to the environment forces the expedition of Kerans’ transformation when Strangman drains the lagoon, creating a monstrous geography that is devoid of life, in essence ripping apart the seams of the only home that Kerans inhabits and relates to. Kerans is traumatized by this new image, of “dim, rectangular outlines of submerged buildings, their open windows like empty eyes in enormous drowned skulls” (Ballard 120). As Kerans and Bea gaze out on the “total inversion of his normal world” they are “physically repelled” by the “once limpid beauty of the underwater city [turned] into a drained and festering sewer” (121). Kerans’ only recourse is to forsake Bea and the newly returned Riggs, and blow up the dyke in order to reconstruct the home of his memory, the home that is representative of the new ecology, and thus the new man.

**A New Adam**

Attempting to discern what Kerans is seeking after he leaves the lagoon is problematic. As a “second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn sun,”
he has chosen to remove himself from intrusive structures of life at Camp Byrd, as in Riggs’ case, or the devastating forces of a life lived for material gain, as in Strangman’s. He has become a living component of nature, making his way alone through the elements, with the knowledge that he might soon die in the jungle. Is this a death drive that motivates the new human to follow a dying sun into the wilderness, or is there something else at stake? Has his sense of “intimate immensity” extended his idea of “home,” compelling him like a neophyte explorer to discover all of its corners before the end of his life? Or is there some sense that his journey marks the beginning of a new age for humans, albeit a different human who instead of controlling nature learns to bend to its power? It is interesting to see how Kerans, like D-503 in We, sheds the self so eagerly when surrounded by the magnitude of the natural world. Although in the end D-503 is afraid of the power of that transformation, Kerans embraces it, even though it portends death. One thing is sure from both depictions: nature is associated with a vast freedom that is not provided by the human systems and structures that organize and control human societies. This is the freedom to imagine greater worlds, to contemplate one’s identity, to inhabit the wild spaces of untamed nature and to find within them both the remnants of home, and a sense of self beyond the one imposed by superficial control.
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