



ABSTRACT MACHINES IN J. G. BALLARD'S *HIGH-RISE*

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ABSTRACT. This article sets out to explore how J. G. Ballard's *High-Rise* (1975) can be read through Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of rhizome, abstract machines and schizophrenia. The social structure of the Seventies in England, *High-Rise* as a building and *High Rise* as a novel are connected to one another to portray a rhizome that manifests a dystopian answer to the inquiry of human nature. *High-Rise* can be studied as an abstract machine since it is a machine of fiction through which the readers question the meaning of humanity. *High-Rise*, the building, is also an abstract machine in itself since it operates as a means to reveal the constant process of becoming under late capitalism. Therefore, this article aims to reveal the Deleuze-Guattarian dynamics in *High-Rise* in relation to *High-Rise*, the building, by focusing on the social elements that expose the schizophrenic aspects of late capitalism.

Keywords: J. G. Ballard, *High-Rise*, Deleuze and Guattari, Abstract Machine, Rhizome, Schizophrenia.

MÁQUINAS ABSTRACTAS EN *HIGH-RISE*, DE J. G. BALLARD

RESUMEN. El objetivo de este artículo es explorar cómo *High-Rise* (1975), de J. G. Ballard, puede ser leída a través de los conceptos de Deleuze y Guattari de rizoma, máquinas abstractas y esquizofrenia. La estructura social de los años setenta en Inglaterra, *High-Rise* como edificio y *High-Rise* como novela están conectados entre sí para retratar un rizoma que manifiesta una respuesta distópica a la pregunta de la naturaleza humana. *High-Rise* puede ser estudiado como una máquina abstracta dado que es una máquina de ficción a través de la cual los lectores se cuestionan el sentido de la humanidad. *High-Rise*, el edificio, también es una máquina abstracta en sí misma dado que opera como medio para revelar el proceso constante de ser bajo el capitalismo tardío. Por ello, el propósito de este artículo es el de revelar las dinámicas de Deleuze y Guattari en *High-Rise* en relación con *High-Rise*, el edificio, al centrarse en los elementos sociales que exponen los aspectos esquizofrénicos del capitalismo tardío.

Palabras clave: J. G. Ballard, *High-Rise*, Deleuze y Guattari, Máquina Abstracta, Rizoma, Esquizofrenia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The residents of J. G. Ballard's *High-Rise* do not merely live in a building; they are moulded by it. *High-Rise* is an ultimate manifestation of fears regarding what would happen to humans if they were left to live in fashionable prisons. The structure of the building does not only shape its characters but it further alters the perceptions of the novel's readers, inviting them into a "rhizome" as residents of the narrative themselves. Deleuze and Guattari define "rhizome" as an entity that "has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (2005: 25; emphasis original). It is true that the structure of *High-Rise*, the building, seems to be divided into three parts, at least socially, but once the building starts to dysfunction and the social lines begin to blur, it turns into a middle-ground on which there are no social or moral codes that can be used to clearly separate the residents of the building from one another. In fact, even though the readers learn at first glance that the apartment is divided into the classic understanding of upper, middle and lower classes¹, soon they also figure out that these social classes do not include the real lower and upper classes of the world that exist outside the borders of *High-Rise*. The residents are actually "a virtually

¹ Ballard's fiction outlines the struggles between the upper, middle and lower classes in order to reveal the human condition under the influence of capitalism. Studies of these classes are usually centred around the struggles of the middle class, referring to upper and lower classes in a manner of relative importance (Wilson 2017: 96; Wood 2017: 203; Caserio 1988: 303; Beckman 2013: 276). Studying the three classes under such a lens is problematic since it disguises the operating forces of the rhizome as a whole.

homogeneous collection of well-to-do professional people” (Ballard 2012: 9) which reveals that the upper and the lower classes outside the building are not actually included in the narration. The concrete jungle of *High-Rise* is placed just outside the city, but not too far away to be completely detached from it, creating an in-between space where the residents can roam freely without the laws that constrain the citizens living in the city: “For all the proximity of the City two miles away to the west along the river, the office buildings of central London belonged to a different world, in time as well as space” (Ballard 2012: 7). Once the operational systems of the building start to fail, it becomes more apparent that the building is formed as a never ending circle of labyrinths with its many elevators, chutes, and corridors. Therefore, this article focalizes how *High-Rise*, the novel, is an abstract machine that (de)constructs its characters’ beings, leading its readers to question the nature of the human species. Furthermore, *High-Rise*, the building, can also be considered as an abstract machine that makes its subjects a part of its own continuous process of becoming with its design that creates “a body without organs” by using its apartments as mental prisons. In order to expose the Deleuze-Guattarian dynamics of the narrative, this article makes use of terms such as the rhizome and abstract machines to exemplify how the characters in the narrative display schizophrenic symptoms and how these symptoms are actually side effects of life under late capitalism as narrated by Ballard as a reflection of the English society during the seventies.

2. RHIZOME AND *HIGH-RISE* IN ENGLAND IN THE SEVENTIES

Deleuze and Guattari define the rhizome as a system of non-hierarchical web of multiplicity that can be likened to a “subterranean stem” (2005: 6). The rhizomatic stem refers to a flowing network that operates more like a “map” rather than a formulaic tracing of meanings (2005: 12). Deleuze and Guattari assign six principles to better explain the characteristics of the rhizome: Connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography and decalomania (2005: 7-13). Ballard’s narrative that interweaves the realities of his time with his fictional structure clearly reveals the connection of *High-Rise* to the social dynamics in England. This connection transforms the novel into a cartographic representation of English society under late capitalism in Ballard’s perspective. As if performing decalomania, it can be argued that Ballard aims “to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the dark recesses of memory and language” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 2) by imagining a building in a form of animated machinery that would act as a microcosmic symbol of a capitalist society that drives its residents towards a schizophrenic mode of being. *High-Rise*, the building, further displays heterogeneity and multiplicity in its depiction of the characters and the social classes they form in the narrative. The “well-to-do professional people” (Ballard 2012: 9) seem to belong to middle class whereas it is quickly understood how the definition of class is altered contextually once placed in an abstract machine that further separates them into smaller units of upper, middle and lower formations. There are certain asignifying ruptures in the building, the technical along with architectural

design issues that make it not so suitable for humans to live in, and yet, the building still stands as a whole at the end of the narrative despite being direly attacked. Moreover, the existence of other High-Rises reveal how “[a] rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 9). To Deleuze and Guattari, “[t]he map” that the rhizome offers “does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency” (2005: 12). Such an understanding of theoretical approach to narratives makes it possible to read *High-Rise* both as a map that exemplifies the human condition in England in the seventies and also as a map that creates its own rhizomatic existence through a connection between the abstract machine of the building and its residents.

Considering that *High-Rise* was a product of England in the seventies, it can be suggested that the novel is part of the rhizomatic entity of the era which demonstrates the intrinsic fears of the period within its body of narration. *High-Rise*, the novel, operates within the socio-cultural setting of the time to underline the threats that are caused by class wars, economic regression, political extremism and violence (Morgan 2017: 2). Likewise, High-Rise, the building, is situated as a machine which actively drives its residents towards a certain direction of entropy. In appearance, the novel enables the residents to freely discover who they truly are: “For the first time it removed the need to repress every kind of anti-social behaviour, and left them free to explore any deviant or wayward impulses” (Ballard 2012: 34). Nonetheless, under this appearance there is a false sense of freedom. The residents never really experience the building as a fully functioning operational system for them to explore their isolation. It does not take more than a couple of months for the building to completely fail its residents and force them to form clans to survive. Every class of the building has a different set of elevators, entrances and lobbies which suggests that the architects of the building directed the residents towards their respective groups quite inconspicuously. Hatherley states that the High-Rise provides its residents with primal desires such as “sex, violence, clan loyalties, rigid hierarchies of power and seniority” and this creates liberation in a “terrifying fashion” (2016: 71). Bradshaw and Brown agree with Hatherley and further comment that High-Rise manifests a failure of “socialist or social democratic imagination” which has “disappeared from the political landscape” (2018: 14). High-Rise is evaluated as “the final failure of an attempt towards modernist spatial planning; as modernism’s death-knell” (2018: 14). Contrary to this popular belief, I believe that High-Rise does not represent the disappointment in socialist spatial planning more than it emphasizes the insistence of portraying a socialist utopia as doomed in a narrative.

The residents are never actually given the opportunity to be free in this narrative. They are ultimately bound by the cell-like structure of the building that imprisons them and thus turns them into perpetrators. The abstract machine of High-Rise seems to have a will of its own, almost contributing to the violence through power shortages that cause blackouts, failing air-conditioning systems that make the air

hard to breathe and garbage-disposal chutes that get clogged. In Stoner's words, *High-Rise* is "modern dystopian narrative of architecture's power to provoke conflict, alienation, and violence" (2013: 179). To divert the attention from such failures and to emphasize the innate evil nature of the human species, it is noted how "Laing had already discovered, people in high-rises tended not to care about tenants more than two floors below them" (Ballard 2012: 7). The residents of the building almost expect such an outcome: "Despite the harassment and increasing violence, no one was surprised by these events" (Ballard 2012: 57). The narrator even points out that "[i]n the future, violence would clearly become a valuable form of social cement" (Ballard 2012: 88). In his article that focuses on the issue of mental health problems in high-rises, Cappon draws attention to how humanity has to be careful towards the "vertical coffins" that may lead to "the premature death of our civilization" and yet, this does not mean that there is any "in-controvertible evidence and the mechanism whereby the high-rise leads to the low fall of urban humanity" (1971: 431). This argument suggests that what causes the mental "fall" of urban humanity is not solely the buildings, or architectural designs for that matter. It is the rhizomatic entanglements of the effects of late capitalism that create an illusion of the High-Rise as such an impressive machine. High-Rise is completely detached from nature but its residents such as Laing start to make "less and less effort to leave the building" because of how "delighted" he is by the "glut of conveniences" (Ballard 2012: 7). It is apparent that High-Rise creates an artificial space in which humans are made to believe they can survive only to realize that it is only a matter of time before their mental health deteriorates much similar to the late capitalist society that offers unlimited technology but little care for its consequences on the human psyche.

Thus, it can be argued that *High-Rise*, the novel, and High-Rise, the building, are interwoven into one another as parts of the same rhizome. 1970s England is represented through a dystopian lens which intertwines reality with fiction, ever transforming the residents of High-Rise and the readers of *High-Rise* alike. Nonetheless, this transformation does not include the possibility of humans acting in cooperation. It is yet another proof that without law and order and the existence of an ultimate figure of authority, human beings are doomed to a chaotic and violent future. The effeminate psychiatrist of the High-Rise, Adrian Talbot, regards all the violence in the building as natural consequences of living in such a society. After being assaulted by other residents he comments on how he is also on the verge of losing his rationality:

I had a bucket of urine thrown over me this afternoon. Much more of that and I may take up a cudgel myself. It's a mistake to imagine that we're all moving towards a state of happy primitivism. The model here seems to be less the noble savage than our un-innocent post-Freudian selves, outraged by all that over-indulgent toilet-training, dedicated breast-feeding and parental affection – obviously a more dangerous mix than anything our Victorian forebears had to cope with. Our neighbours had happy childhoods to a man and still feel angry. Perhaps they resent never having had a chance to become perverse. (Ballard 2012: 105)

The emphasis on having “a chance to become perverse” reveals to what extent the narrative focuses on criticizing the ideals of capitalism that keeps the society intact. It is suggested that the reason humanity is headed towards a vandal future is because of the ontological state of human nature that is perverse, evil and violent.

Yet, the initial “over-priced cell” (Ballard 2012: 6) like design, the failing “glut of conveniences” and the structure of the building that offers less as the floors descend reveals that the violence in the building has more to do with an economic, political and social structure of a capitalist society that is already a high-rise on its own that drains any potential of a peaceful future. Ballard is well aware of the rising levels of urban violence (1991: 34). He does not believe in an optimistic future: “If people are going to survive they will need to do this on the plane of the imagination much more than they have done. Otherwise, they’ll simply become a mark on some consumer chart” (1991: 32). In accordance with Ballard’s views, the narrative underlines that human beings would choose violence as long as they can form groups and they are not left alone in isolation: “For the first time it occurred to Wilder that the residents enjoyed this breakdown of its services, and the growing confrontation between themselves. All this brought them together, and ended the frigid isolation of the previous months” (Ballard 2012: 57). The interesting point here is that the residents are free to leave the building any time they want but they choose to remain in this chaos: “Despite the growing chaos around them, the residents showed less interest in the external world” (Ballard 2012: 73). Even when the level of vandalism grows “deliberately excessive”, the residents continue “cutting themselves off from the outside world” (97). These lines manifest how humans are portrayed as beings that would choose violence rather than learning how to live together in a high-tech building. Once tasting the pleasure of “a chance to become perverse”, they do not want to go back to the heart of civilization that is the city. Thus, the residents seemingly choose to remain in this violent rhizome when, in fact, it can be understood that this decision is manipulated by High-Rise, the abstract machine.

3. ABSTRACT MACHINE AS A HIGH-RISE, *HIGH-RISE* AS AN ABSTRACT MACHINE

High-Rise does not have a clear beginning or an ending, or rather it starts exactly where it ends creating an infinite loop, forcing its readers to remain in a narrative purgatory. In parallel, High-Rise the building, is also designed to create a middle ground on which a constant state of becoming can be organically represented. The becoming of the building, as “a huge machine designed to serve” (Ballard 2012: 9), its constant deterioration along with the characters’ descent into madness and violence as the narration progresses, its ending that reveals the circularity of the events with the first signs of technological failure in one of the other High-Rises, reveal a backward and forward motion simultaneously. In “Concrete Rules and Abstract Machines”, Deleuze and Guattari put forward that “[e]ach abstract machine is a consolidated whole of matters-functions” that can be traced in “a technological ‘plane’” (1984: 15). High-Rise, that can be read as such a “technological plane”, “is

not simply made of formed substances, aluminum, plastic, electric wire, etc., nor of organizing forms, program, prototypes, etc., but of a totality (ensemble) of unformed matters" (1984: 15). This totality formed as an "assemblage", "occur[s] in forms and substances with variable states of freedom" (1984: 15). As Massumi explains, "[t]he abstract machine is interpretation. It is the meaning process, from the point of view of a given expression. Any sign, quality or statement, as the trace of a process of becoming can be considered a de facto diagram from which a formal diagram of the operative abstract machine could be developed" (1996: 17). *High-Rise* as a narrative and *High-Rise* as a building both come to represent the two parts of the same rhizome since the meanings they create are intertwined with one another. Furthermore, they constitute this rhizomatic structure by functioning as two simultaneously operating abstract machines. The narrative conceptualizes the fears of the seventies in England while the building exposes to what extent the human psyche can be challenged through these fears, ultimately creating a meaning process for the readers to experience the operative systems of the society they are living in. At the very beginning Robert Laing, who interestingly lives right in the middle of the building, is surprised that "there had been no obvious beginning, no point beyond which their lives had moved into a clearly more sinister dimension" (Ballard 2012: 6). At the very end of the novel, it is again Robert Laing who witnesses how the second of the blocks starts to fail, "ready to welcome [its residents] to their new world" (2012: 166). Laing's orientation as a character that greets the readers and then bids them farewell contributes to the circularity of the narration in terms of time and space. The readers who experience Laing's account of the events are also invited to be part of the abstract machine as common agents who experience the schizophrenic state of the characters in the novel through Ballard's narrative.

The building and its residents are part of the abstract machine that enables them to be both organically and metaphorically incorporated into one another. The *High-Rise* is defined "as if it [is] some kind of huge animate presence, brooding over them and keeping a magisterial eye on the events taking place" (Ballard 2012: 37). When the events take a darker turn and the residents gradually begin to lose any civilized form of communication (Stephenson 1991: 83), the building is defined as an organic entity once again: "At night the dark bands stretched across the face of the high-rise like dead strata in a fading brain" (Ballard 2012: 72). According to Wilson, "Ballard equates the technological machine with the soft machinery of the human body. The high-rise feels like a living being" (2017: 95). The building is likened to an entity that has its own brain, or in other words, its own rational will to act. Ballard manages to create a character out of a space using an architectural design to give voice to an entity that has an influence on the beings living within it. The design of the building as an organic entity has a quite specific purpose of warning the human species against the dangers of living in isolated vertical structures (Fässler 2020: 5). And yet, despite appearing as a warning, the *High-Rise* takes the form of "a body without organs" in Deleuze and Guattari's terms. *High-Rise* can be read as "[a] body without organs" that functions as a "medium of becoming or of transformation" (1984: 12). The residents of *High-Rise* are ultimately afflicted by the building, finding themselves in a constant process of becoming. This transformation from seemingly "well-to-do

professionals” into violent savages reveals to what extent the building plays a role on their mental states.

It is also significant that Deleuze and Guattari point out to different types of a “body without organs” such as “the *hypochondriac*”, “the *paranoid*”, “the *schizo*”, “the *drugged*” and “the *masochist*” (2005: 150, emphasis original). The residents of the High-Rise create their own bodies without organs under the constant becoming state of the building. All residents of the High-Rise reveal symptoms of these bodies, especially in terms of paranoia, schizophrenia and masochism. It is important that the first quarrel in the novel is due to the “higher” residents of the building being disturbed by the possibility of young children of the “lower” residents contaminating the swimming pool, revealing a hypochondriac tendency. In the “Fourth Chapter”, Wilder’s growing hatred towards the “higher” residents becomes more apparent, manifesting his paranoia against the structure of the building. Laing starts to drug Eleanor and Alice since “their addiction would tilt the balance of authority in his direction again and increase their dependence on him” (Ballard 2012: 165). Finally, the extent of masochism becomes more striking once Laing starts to accept all the violence as “normal”: “On the whole, life in the high-rise had been kind to him. To an increasing extent, everything was returning to normal” (2012: 165). Laing is uttering these words as the building is severely damaged, many are killed and he, himself, is eating a dog on a balcony while parts of the building are deteriorating. All residents that are introduced in the novel seem to end the novel in a quite schizophrenic state, where women form a community of their own as “sisters of sinister charity” (2012: 113), Wilder completely losing his mind, Royal never leaving the building even though he intends to do so and Laing, Eleanor and Alice seem to live in a sado-masochistic relationship.

High-Rise can also be read as an “abstract machine” because it constantly represents a state of becoming through its body without organs; therein creating an endless web of meaning processes and simultaneously interweaving the “being” of the building with that of its residents (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 17). In parallel, *High-Rise*, the novel, invites its readers into a rhizomatic narrative that has neither a clear beginning nor an end. The origins of how and why the buildings are planned, to whom the money earned by the apartments go to, or the ending of the narration are all left without clear explanations. Therefore, this article situates *High-Rise*, the novel, as an “abstract machine” that operates to manipulate the readers’ perceptions of modern society and human nature through its plot to disguise the dynamics actually responsible for the mayhem caused in the novel. While the readers are focused on Royal, as if to label him as a scapegoat for everything that happens, they fail to see that there is actually a group of architects who continue their experiments. The readers learn that Royal is a “well-to-do architect, a former member of the consortium which had designed the development project” (Ballard 2012: 14). Royal is not only a member of a larger group who has come up with designing such an inhumane project but he is a former member, too. This detachment from the consortium signals how Royal stops functioning as a part of the authorial control once he moves into the building. He has become one of the parts of the machine

he aids to create. Wilson agrees with the idea that “Royal may have produced the machine, but like everybody in *High-Rise*, he is a product of the machine” (2017: 96). Even though Anthony Royal is at the very top of the building and seems to be the face of the “richest” group and the one responsible for the whole experiment, I believe there is a much stronger and invisible body of authority here at play in disguise of the building. In the first half of the novel, there is an illusion, an on-going impression that the residents of the highest floors have power and they can assume an authoritative role over the lower floors: “What angered Wilder most of all about life in the apartment building was the way in which an apparently homogeneous collection of high-income professional people had split into three distinct and hostile camps. The old social subdivisions, based on power, capital and self-interest, had reasserted themselves here as anywhere else” (Ballard 2012: 49-50). Nonetheless, the first human death of the building is that of a resident from the fortieth floor (Ballard 2012: 39) which directly signals how none of the so-called classes of the building are free from the abstract machine’s operation. *High-Rise* lacks any kind of visible authority and its residents make sure to fend off the police when they come too close, “reassuring [the police] that everything was in order, despite the garbage and broken bottles scattered around the building” (Ballard 2012: 125). Orr states that this avoidance from the police is “Ballard’s great leap [...] to isolate the characters for their desperate struggles but have them all conspire to keep the fighting going” (2000: 490). Even the richest people, including Anthony Royal and other fortieth level residents cannot survive the building, which reveals that the entire population of the building is under war conditions. Davis argues that “[t]he building is cast as a libidinal time machine of sorts, rekindling atavistic tendencies, conjuring a ‘renascent barbarism’ and ‘a falling interest in civilized conventions of every kind’. Characters adopt pre-linguistic wails and grunts, engage in intoxicated rituals and orgiastic bouts of violence, daub themselves with war paint and scrawl graffiti like ‘the priapic figures drawn by cave-dwellers’” (2017: 1750).

There is no question that all the residents are at war as the building turns into a no man’s land, but who is waging this war? The responsibility here lies with the invisible capitalist workings of a State that is hidden under the guise of a consortium of architects that designs such an abstract machine to be able to profit from it, to condition people into believing there is no other alternative possible to live in such an environment dominated by technology. There appears to be a huge lack in the narrative that hides the body of a capitalist State which places its citizens in a “megamachine” only to destroy them, not to mention that they continue building such blocks despite already witnessing what has happened in the first one. Deleuze and Guattari assert that “if it is the modern State that gives capitalism its models of realization, what is thus realized is an independent, worldwide axiomatic that is like a single City, megalopolis, or ‘megamachine’ of which the States are parts, or neighborhoods” (2005: 434-5). I believe *High-Rise*, the building, serves as a microcosmic representation of such a “megamachine”. Laing notices that there is “something alienating about the concrete landscape of the project – an architecture designed for war, on the unconscious level if no other” (*High-Rise* 9). Deleuze and Guattari also note that “[t]otal war is not only a war of annihilation but arises when

annihilation takes as its 'center' not only the enemy army, or the enemy State, but the entire population and its economy. The fact that this double investment can be made only under prior conditions of limited war illustrates the irresistible character of the capitalist tendency to develop total war" (2005: 421). It is only profitable to create such an environment built for war if the people can be convinced that they need to be controlled by the State. The point of the narration here is quite problematic since it seems to suggest that human nature is inherently evil and without the State as the ultimate authority that forces manners of civilization, it will turn back to its savage ways of violence. The building is built to be sold and consumed, much like its residents who are ideologically manipulated to buy into the idea of "the intangible appeal of life in a luxury high-rise" (Ballard 2012: 9) and then perish in the process. Ballard himself comments in *Extreme Metaphors* that "I myself think that man, if you like, is a naturally perverse animal, that the elements of psychopathology or perversity or moral deviancy are a very large part of his character" (2012: 80). Depicting humans as perverse animals stuck in a zoo-like environment is ontologically labelling human nature as evil and therefore doomed to fail to adapt to the high-tech society of the future. Ballard leaves no alternative to question whether the residents of the High-Rise would manage to adapt to their conditions if the building did not fail in the first place. Matthews is of the opinion that "the novel depicts violence in a conventional light as a force that threatens and fragments communities" (2013: 124). Without any kind of law enforcement to control the violence, even these "well-to-do" professionals are bound to lose their ways. It is worth noting that "no one had fired a single shot, despite the epidemic of violence. Wilder knew perfectly well why. He himself would never bring himself to fire this shotgun, even at the point of death. There was an unspoken agreement among the residents of the high-rise that their confrontation would be resolved by physical means alone" (Ballard 2012: 120). The return to physical violence, even the hint at "cannibalism" out of "necessity" (Ballard 2012: 164-5), seems to be forgiven in the name of exploring the human psyche in its "free" condition and seen as a natural consequence of living under such circumstances. Nevertheless, this implication that the violence in the building is ultimately derived from a natural inclination towards self-protection and has nothing to do with modern tools of warfare is rendered meaningless once Wilder murders Royal with a pistol (Ballard 2012: 159). The nameless narrator warns at the very beginning that "[p]art of [the building's] appeal lay all too clearly in the fact that this was an environment built, not for man, but for man's absence" (Ballard 2012: 23). Groes points out how "the high-rise is not a machine for living but a self-contained and self-sustaining organism divorced from community" (2012: 134). Such an organism designed to protect its own existence at the expense of its residents is bound to separate individuals from one another, thereby preventing any opportunities of social interaction, communication and cooperation – all tools that would have made it possible for the residents of high-rise to be able to survive together in peace. Furthermore, this organism does, in fact, stand as an abstract machine that operates in such a manner that it sustains its own body without organs through its schizophrenic residents.

In support of the dangers of creating abstract machines in the form of high-rises, Doxiadis and Hill's study evaluates "the construction of high-rise buildings" as a "crime" that will make "generations to come" suffer since the balance between "Nature" and "Man" is overthrown (1972: 296). Such buildings "work against Man himself, especially against children who lose their direct contacts with Nature", they break the familial bonds in a society such as "the extended family, the neighbourhood etc.", and problematize "Networks" because they are very hard to sustain (1972: 296). They conclude that high-rises are economically, socially, politically, technologically, culturally and aesthetically problematic (1972: 296). As an expression of the fears directed towards such structures, *High-Rise* was also never meant to be built to sustain humans but it was designed to consume them and to turn them into parts of its organic body without organs. Groes points out that *High-Rise* expresses "late capitalism's brutal reshaping of the social and cognitive processes that determine everyday lives" which "capture[s] the texture of modernity" (2012: 124). In such an environment, language loses its importance and concrete technology assumes a fatal role in determining social relations in a "monstrous" and "dehumanizing" manner (2012: 124). To be human in such a high-tech environment is "to be partly machine" as Ballard, Baudrillard and Donna Haraway would argue in common, yet, this transformative process is ultimately "traversed by the ideologies of multinational capitalism" (Butterfield 1999: 74). Therefore, the argument that *High-Rise* is a social experiment to freely explore the psychopathological conditions of humans as suggested by the narrator and critics² analyzing the novel seem to miss a crucial point: Human nature is deliberately portrayed as destructive and violent whereas the influence of the abstract machine on the residents of the *High-Rise* seems to be overlooked. The issue at hand is, perhaps, not as much about the ontological state of human nature than it is about how late capitalism gives way to the production of such abstract machines that would drive that nature to an extreme state of violence purposefully.

4. LATE CAPITALISM, SCHIZOPHRENIA AND RESIDENTS OF THE WAR MACHINE

In alliance with R. D. Laing, whose influence on the character of Laing has been studied by scholars such as Bradshaw and Brown (2018), Deleuze and Guattari claim that "the schizophrenic process" is "a voyage of initiation, a transcendental experience of the loss of the Ego" (2000: 84). This transcendental experience is the "process of the production of desire and desiring-machines" (2000: 24). The three main characters of the novel are neatly placed in their respective floors with Royal on the fortieth, Laing on the twenty-fifth and Wilder at the second as if to map out the "transcendental experience" of the residents through various floors that reveal their social status. Even their names, Royal, Laing and Wilder expose their characters

² *High-Rise* is depicted as "a model of all that technology had done to make possible the expression of a truly 'free' psychopathology" by Ballard in the novel (2012: 34). Matthews (2013: 123), Bradshaw & Brown (2018: 5), and Gray (2019: 152) study the novel in this psychopathological context.

to a certain extent³. As critics such as Groes (2012), Sellers and O'Hara (2012), and Bradshaw and Brown (2018) have also noted, Royal, Laing and Wilder come to represent the classical social groups of lower, middle and upper classes. As the building's technical operation system starts to fail, the residents slowly begin their "voyages of initiation" in a concrete jungle. Since Anthony Royal is placed at the top and stated as the "zoo-keeper" (Ballard 2012: 63), it is almost too easy to assume that he is the one responsible for the project. In fact, D. Harlan Wilson addresses Royal as "a mad (social) scientist" and claims that "the high-rise is *bis* monster and laboratory" (2017: 95, emphasis mine). Bradshaw and Brown call the building Royal's "moribund creation" (2018: 7). Stoner writes that "[t]he 'Royal' architect has designed a building that arouses primitive survival instincts in its residents" (2013: 180). In alliance, Groes argues "[t]he name of the resident architect of the high-rise, Anthony Royal, already implies that his attempt at creating an egalitarian microcosm" will lead to failure (2012: 136). Furthermore, Stephenson points out that "[t]he high-rise is repeatedly likened to a zoo, and indeed, we are told that 'Zoos and the architecture of large structures' had always been the 'particular interest' [...] of the architect of the high-rise, Anthony Royal" (1991: 81). What all these critics have in common is that they name Anthony Royal as the sole architect of the building and the only one responsible for the mayhem. Yet, I argue that this is actually far from the truth since "[f]or all his professional identification with the high-rise as one of its architects, Royal's contribution had been minor, but sadly for him had concerned those very sections which had borne the brunt of the residents' hostility" (Ballard 2012: 66). Why, then, is Anthony Royal picked out as a scapegoat? Royal is placed in the building to control the residents; however, his being is also altered by the abstract machinery of the building. Royal is called the "zoo-keeper" for a reason; he does live in the building and insists on remaining there until the very end when his life is taken by no other than Wilder as if to signify the revenge of the lower class. Royal, too, is punished in the novel for being a visible symbol of authority who assumes an ultimate role of control, when in reality, he is one of the parts of the abstract machine. He may be a keeper but he does not own the zoo. He is yet another schizophrenic resident that is undeniably transformed by the body of the building without organs.

Royal insists on trying to keep his position of authority to the very end until he is fatally wounded by Wilder, after which he climbs down the social ladder of the building to die at the 10th floor. The only one surviving at the end is not the richest, nor the poorest of the building. It is Laing who is the best to adapt to the conditions he is living in. Perhaps Laing is not the fittest as Wilder, nor is he the richest as Royal, but he is certainly the one who manages to truly adapt to the building by learning how to survive in a most dysfunctional environment. In Wagar's words, "Ballard does not preach resistance, if by resistance one means fighting in the arena of politics and economics to overthrow the capitalist system or the warfare state or

³ Analyzing the name of the characters, Bradshaw and Brown pinpoint Royal as the ego, Wilder as the id and Laing as the ego which enables a psychoanalytic study of the novel (2018: 5).

neo-colonialism or sexism and racism" (1971: 65). The survival of Laing does not depend on resistance, or any belief in changing the system for the better, it depends on adaptation. Laing finds freedom in learning how to become one with the abstract machine by remaining passive and managing to stay alive. To Davies, Laing is "equally adapted to the dynamics of the building at the beginning of the novel as at the end, and it comes as no surprise that in the final scene he is thinking of returning to work and refurbishing parts of the high-rise" (2017: 1758). Laing is the prototype of a new kind of human being: "A new social type was being created by the apartment building, a cool, unemotional personality impervious to the psychological pressures of high-rise life, with minimal needs for privacy, who thrived like an advanced species of machine in the neutral atmosphere" (Ballard 2012: 33). Despite being labelled as "neutral", the atmosphere of the building is clearly biased since it creates a new kind of species with Laing as its representative that embodies "a new alliance between perversion and capitalism" to use Davies's words (2017: 1758).

Deleuze and Guattari argue that "total war remains subordinated to State political aims and merely realizes the maximal conditions of the appropriation of the war machine by the State apparatus" (2005: 421). In the context of *High-Rise*, all residents of the building are under a total war that has no apparent cause apart from the ontological perversity of human beings. The underlying cause of this war seems to be a form of State which "undertakes its integrative and neutralizing role in a way that accords with what Deleuze and Guattari [...] have identified as the fundamental law of the State – war and the fear of war" (Surin 1991: 110). The war-machine status of *High-Rise* reveals a larger system of capitalist dynamics that force the residents out of their rationality. The air is constantly stale, the lights keep fading and it is hard to find food – none of the basic physiological needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs are met in the building. It is almost as if the building is built in this manner on purpose in order to create a "worldwide war machine", which has "no other aim than itself", forcing individuals to live in a world of "the peace of Terror or Survival" (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 421).

5. CONCLUSION

As the rest of the High-Rises are being built, they continue the legacy of the first High-Rise in the exact same chaotic manner which reveals that the most powerful entity that survives despite being severely attacked is the abstract machine itself that protects its own totality one way or the other. This machine is a product of such a formation of State that it keeps its residents under the constant fear of war and, in doing so, leads to schizophrenic symptoms in the novel's characters. Laing, who neither assumes the position of authority as Royal, nor tries to rebel against the system as Wilder, is left alive to prove that if one manages to adapt to the abstract machine, no matter how chaotic or oppressive things get, they will at least survive as part of the machine.

High-Rise is constructed to prove that humans without a state to discipline and punish them are bound to be lost. Studies referred to in this article frequently assert

that the ontological state of the human nature as an evil entity is responsible for the chaos that overruns the High-Rise. Nonetheless, the real evil behind the scenes is the formation of a State that builds the High-Rise in a manner that would drive its residents to violence in the first place. This entity is forever invisible and presumably stronger and richer than all the residents combined when it is considered that all the apartments are eventually sold. Much like the omnipresent narrator of the novel, this invisible bank of power even destroys agents such as Anthony Royal once the agent becomes visible as part of the machine. In the end, it can be understood that Royal, Laing and Wilder and all other residents are turned into organic articulations of the High-Rise as an abstract machine. In fact, the influence of the abstract machine of High-Rise is so important that it becomes clear how “[t]heir real opponent was not the hierarchy of residents in the heights far above them, but the image of the building in their own minds, the multiplying layers of concrete that anchored them to the floor” (Ballard 2012: 55). The evil nature of humans is depicted as the core of the problem while the consortium of architects and the investment used to design the building’s operations remain hidden.

Deleuze and Guattari point out that “abstract machine refers to other abstract machines: not only because they are inseparably political, economic, scientific, artistic, ecological, cosmic – perceptive, affective, active, thinking, physical, and semiotic – but because they make their different types interweave as much as they make their functioning converge” (1984: 17). *High-Rise* refers to High-Rise since the external dynamics that have produced the novel are ultimately inseparable from that of the internal dynamics that create the chaotic conditions of the building. Ballard’s fixation on “consumer-capitalism and the culture machine” (Wilson 2017: 2) transforms the fears of his times to the realities of his narration. Wilson argues that “[a]s with Deleuze and Guattari’s desiring-machines, the tenants’ breakdown is also a breakthrough to a new form of thinking and being” (2017: 95). Yet, this new form of thinking is without any humane logical or emotional foundation. These beings learn how to survive through murder, abuse and theft. The capitalist tendency to dissolve “all institutional stability (schizophrenia)” is revealed through the delirium of the residents (Hoa 2012: 79). *High-Rise* is complete with its “inherent tendency brought to fulfilment”, with the exploration of psychopathology, “its surplus product”, that is the illusionary abundance of the building while being marketed, “its proletariat”, that is its lower floor residents and its “exterminating angel”, Wilder (2012: 79). Stephenson argues that Ballard “warns us against succumbing to the pressures brought to bear upon us by our rational-technological environment and becoming ‘like an advanced species of Machine’ (35), and against the hazards inherent in a surrender to atavism as a desperate reaction to the sterility and dehumanization of our lives” (1991: 84). The danger, however, is not turning into machines. It is considering that the enemy is technology and the violent and the perverse means “attaining liberation” and “repossessing authentic being” (1991: 84). Beckman points out that the problem is to “free” people “from their specific spatiotemporal prisons” (2013: 280). The residents of High-Rise may seem like they are in their own prisons but destroying their prison through violence and justifying it by exploring the limits of humanity creates a false sense of freedom and an

unreasonable fear against technology. Despite being hailed as a novel that criticizes the capitalist system that devours its individuals, I conclude that *High-Rise* actually reinforces the main ideals of such a schizophrenic political, economic and social structure by focusing on the particulars and neglecting the entirety of the abstract machine that was designed by a late capitalist State.

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