




DOCUMENT

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Foreword to Applied Ballardianism

Omitted from the first printing of Applied Ballardianism for legal reasons, this foreword by Dr Ricardo Battista sheds some light upon the genesis of this peculiar ‘memoir’ and the fate of its sadly afflicted author

Applied Ballardianism: Memoir from a Parallel Universe tells the story of a man who lived in Melbourne, Australia, in the early part of the twenty-first century. He has been missing, presumed dead, for six years. A decade before his disappearance, he commenced a PhD at Hartwell University on the cultural relevance of the author J.G. Ballard, however, he discontinued his candidature after failing to find an appropriate angle. Ten years later, he returned but succumbed to mounting pressure after the long break. He terminated his enrolment for the second and final time and commenced employment as a storeman at a discount warehouse.

In all honesty, he was no great loss to the academy. He possessed a warped interest in Ballard that completely effaced critical thinking, an obsessive compulsive disorder driven by his conviction that the world was so ‘Ballardian’, it allowed him to connect Ballard’s writing with any societal or pop-cultural trend: rampant consumerism; globalism; hypercapitalism; surveillance culture; celebrity architecture; online pornography; commercial sport; road rage; reality TV; far-right political movements; homogenised urban space; violence as entertainment; etc.

To tie it all together, he developed a theory, or rather, a practice, called ‘Applied Ballardianism’, that, first, made the case for Ballard as a philosopher of hypercapitalism, and then attempted to use that

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framework to accelerate the everyday violence at the heart of contemporary society, finally using Ballard’s ideas as a kind of shield against the resulting chaos. Supposedly, this would clear the way so that a ‘pure’ existence could result, sort of like how ‘controlled burning’ works in bushfire prevention. However, while the author considered *Applied Ballardianism* an ‘ideal for living’, all it did was give him licence to indulge his darkest impulses, including a morbid obsession with the occult and a penchant for instigating squalid street brawls.

In the months before he disappeared, I hired him to work as a research assistant on a project I was leading that investigated the apparently sentient behaviour of a new species of Twitter spambots. However, he became convinced the spambots were channelling disembodied messages from the afterlife and that they had infected his computer long after he had reported them to Twitter and their profiles had been deleted. Subsequently, he would spend days without sleep or food, trawling the internet for signs of supernatural phenomena. One search involved the alien entity ‘Indrid Cold’ from the book *The Mothman Prophecies* by UFOlogist

John Keel. Our subject claimed Cold was in contact with him via YouTube's private messaging system. Another search sent him on the trail of an online entity called 'John Titor', who, according to early internet legend, appeared on bulletin boards in 2000 claiming to be a time traveller from 2036.

When these pursuits overwhelmed the research he was supposed to conduct, I was left with no option but to terminate his contract and suggest he seek medical help. At the time, new forms of neurological treatment had emerged that promised to rewire the 'plasticity' of the brain so that a more positive worldview could result. I referred him to an experimental practitioner specialising in this area and that was the last I saw of him, although I heard from a colleague that he was subsequently involved in a fight at the warehouse, which resulted in a customer sustaining serious injury. Clearly, the treatment was not working, and he had lapsed into his old ways. He was last seen fleeing towards the nearby truck stop diner, but when a colleague followed him there, she couldn't locate him and assumed he had hitched a ride in the truck that was leaving as she arrived.

Occasionally, over the past few years, a person fitting his description has been sighted loitering around other truck stops on the city fringe. Prostitutes working those areas have reported sexual congress with a man of similar appearance, and he was apparently sighted in the crowd at a 'Double Elvis' cabaret show at a convention centre on the Hume Highway. The most substantial sighting occurred when our subject, wearing an old army jacket and full beard, was alleged to have sold used vehicle parts to several drivers at the Cooper St Super Truck Stop in outer suburban Melbourne.

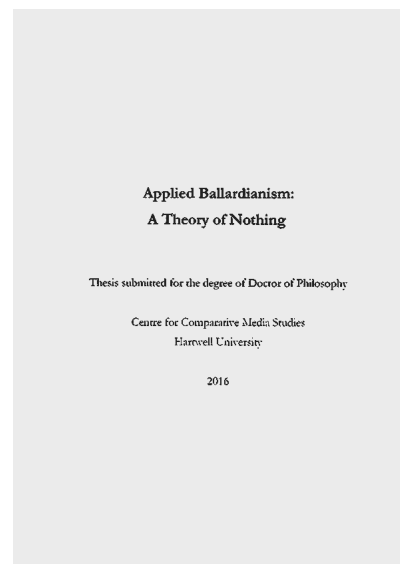
Witnesses said he was agitated and appeared to be sleeping in the decrepit pickup truck he arrived in. He carried a battered copy of Ballard's novel *Concrete Island*, which, he told a waitress, was a how-to guide for 'surviving the edgelands'. When the poor woman tried to take his order, he told her he was an 'exurban lab rat' and warned her to 'back off' if she didn't want to be bitten and infected. These sightings indicated he was living rough, although it is unclear how he evaded surveillance and detection for such an extended period. A full police search was deployed

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to find him, as the injured customer from the warehouse wanted to sue, but this was without success.

After his disappearance, a will was found in his apartment. It requested that the document you are about to read be published in full. I drew the short straw. As his last academic employer, the will decreed I should write the foreword, sparing no detail as to the inadequacies, faults and shortcomings of the document. Although I am under no legal obligation to do so, I have decided to comply, if only to issue a warning. As a case study, *Applied Ballardianism* transcends its severe and numerous limitations, however unwittingly, presenting a poignant lesson about the dire straits the academic humanities are in if they enable such shoddy and bizarre work as this.

As the front papers demonstrate, it is clear our subject intended for this document to be his official PhD thesis, yet there is no respect paid to academic rigour. As a dissertation, it is a total failure. In fact, it is insane. The document is highly subjective and frequently nonsensical, and on top of that it is presented as a *memoir*, in which our subject outlines in excruciating detail his battle with the demons that prevented him from finishing his thesis. As such, it fails to explain in any satisfactory way the mechanics of Ballard's writing or the parade of philosophers



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and theorists he attempts to bolt onto Ballard's work. If submitted, it would, without question, have failed his candidature.

Our subject fancies himself a philosopher yet his insight is too superficial and reckless to justify that stance. Thus, when his argument falls away, he reverts to first-person anecdotes out of a crippling sense of inadequacy and the document becomes a pathetic memoir again, yet it doesn't work on that level either, being too self-indulgent and too larded with self-pity, even allowing for the excesses of that genre, to have any kind of literary merit. One simply tires of hearing, over and over, how he is unsuited to the task of 'decoding' Ballard's writing, a see-through lament that relieves him of the pressure of having to do any kind of serious critical analysis

As well, nothing he writes about his own life can be trusted, since he presents the details as if he is living in some kind of science fiction wonderland. He claims he was regularly in contact with UFOs and telepathic entities and he makes all sorts of ludicrous claims about lucid dreaming and disembodied consciousness as a means to divine the essence of Ballardian thought.

Of course, the man's life was marked by a tragic event, which I won't broach here (it was in the local papers at the time it occurred, and readers can search online for the details; he refers to it in oblique terms throughout the 'memoir'). This undoubtedly shaped his destructive and all-engulfing inner state, giving him licence to invent his strange new reality and subsequently withdraw from the world. However, in the final analysis, the tragedy cannot be used as an excuse. A doctoral dissertation should not be the place for therapy but for serious intellectual labour.

To the reader, please understand: the fact that this 'theory', Applied Ballardianism, fails by any measure is no reflection on Ballard or his remarkable body

of work. Rather, it provides a window onto a strange corner of Ballard Studies, where literary analysis can cross over into obsession and even seem like a form of stalking as the critic attempts to 'own' the artist at all costs. Naturally, the work of the great author, Ballard, is eminently worthy of preservation from those who would try to claim his worldview for their own, and the theory is remarkable (if nothing else) for unconsciously demonstrating that point, even if its value is totally useless by any other accepted measure: aesthetically, philosophically, artistically, intellectually.

While I highly doubt this book will be read by a great many people or that the ideas within it will be taken seriously by anyone working in Ballard Studies (given how cringeworthy and repellent the first-person material is, like the confessions of an imbecile, and how unscholarly and deranged the paranormal elements are), with these final words I complete my obligation as the subject's last academic employer, as decreed by his will, and beg my colleagues' forgiveness for appearing within these pages.

May God have mercy on my soul.

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