
Detecting Discipline & Control: J.G. Ballard's Running Wild

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Abstract

J.G. Ballard's 13th novel *Running Wild* (1996) investigates our media-saturated society and its representations. His ideas are explored through experimental and confrontational narratives, which invite us into a world in which desire, violence and innovation collide. Denying neat categorization and incorporating elements from a variety of genres including dystopian science fiction and the detective novel, Ballard's books are confronting, disturbing and exhilarating. Ballard employs the tropes of the detective novel to examine homicidal obsessions, extreme violence, and controlled communities and, as a result, analyzes the sense of communal anxiety and brooding hostility which predominates ostensibly safe and secure gated-communities. Through this investigation he interrogates the cultural associations and motifs of violent trauma. Ballard, however, goes beyond merely identifying the violence and instead focuses on the systems that precipitate the violence and how society reacts to crimes that contradict its understanding of the world. Thus, *Running Wild* manipulates the tropes of detective fiction to explore the world of privilege, gated communities and wealth. Ballard's novel employs the tropes of crime fiction in an unorthodox way to interrogate the pathological manifestations of the society of control as described by Gilles Deleuze and to delve into how these disciplinary processes may affect modern society.

Keywords: J.G. Ballard, Detective Fiction, Gilles Deleuze, Gated Communities, Surveillance, Violence

1. Introduction

J.G. Ballard's work explores our fascination with violence, technology, control, and surveillance. Our media-saturated society and its representations are exposed by the author through experimental and sometimes gruesome narratives such as *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), *Crash* (1973) and *High Rise* (1975), which invite us into a world in which desire, violence and innovation collide. Ballard's writings delve into the psychopathological and narrativize the impacts modern technological society has on our communities and relationships. Moreover, Ballard is famed for writing about the ambiguity of subjectivity and his ideas are influenced by psychoanalysis, experimental literature, and surrealist art. Denying neat categorization and incorporating elements from a variety of genres including dystopian science fiction and the detective novel, Ballard's books are confronting, disturbing and exhilarating. As a speculative writer, however, his focus is more on the immediate than in the distant future: "I've always been interested -- keenly interested -- in the next five minutes, where we are and what happens next" (Ballard, 1994a).

This paper intends to investigate how J.G. Ballard manipulates the tropes of detective fiction to explore the world of privilege, gated communities and wealth. Ballard's novel employs the tropes of crime fiction in an unorthodox way to interrogate the pathological manifestations of the society of control and to delve into how these disciplinary processes may affect modern society.

Starting with *Running Wild*, Ballard's final few novels before his death in 2007 employ the tropes of the detective novel to examine homicidal obsessions, extreme violence, and controlled communities. Ballard analyzes the sense of communal anxiety and brooding hostility which predominates ostensibly safe and secure gated-communities and, in doing so, interrogates the cultural associations and motifs of violent trauma. Ballard, however, goes beyond merely identifying the violence and instead focuses on the systems that precipitate the violence and how society reacts to crimes that contradict its understanding of the world.

Running Wild is a first-person narrative in the form of a forensic diary told by Dr Richard Greville, Deputy Psychiatric Adviser for the Metropolitan Police. After the initial police investigation fails to reach any definitive conclusions, Dr Greville has been asked to assist the investigation into the massacre. On 25 June 1988 starting at 8:30 am, all the adult inhabitants of Pangbourne Village, an affluent, gated community were murdered. Some were electrocuted in their bath, or on their exercise bicycle, many were shot, some were stabbed to death, a couple were crushed against their garage by their own Porsche, some were shot with crossbow bolts. The phone cables to the outside world had been cut and all the cables from the estate's numerous CCTV cameras to the central Security lodge had also been severed, and the security guard asphyxiated. Ten families live in the community, each in a perfect, luxury home, many with indoor gyms and swimming pools and tennis courts in the grounds. All twenty of the parents were executed, along with twelve staff, including au pairs, tutors, gardeners and the two security guards. The thirteen children whose parents were murdered have disappeared and vanished without trace. The media go wild and there's an explosion of theories as to what happened, from a random terrorist attack to a mass suicide on the lines of the Jonestown Massacre, maybe an attack by Russian Special Forces at key managers of vital British infrastructure.

Ballard's novel employs crime fiction tropes in an unorthodox way to explore the processes involved with the society of control and the resulting social alienation. To elucidate this idea, this paper has drawn from a variety of source material. Macsiniuc's *Discipline and Murder: Panoptic Pedagogy and the Aesthetics of Detection in J.G. Ballard's Running Wild* employs Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and provides insights into the connection between discipline, control and rebellion. Furthermore, Baudrillard's concept of the Simulacrum has been helpful to this study as it explores the idea that reality itself has begun merely to imitate the model, which now leads and defines the real world: "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1). Baudrillard argues that when considering postmodern simulation and simulacra, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2). I have also used theorists who have discussed Metaphysical Detective Fiction, including Patricia Merivale and Susan Sweeney, Howard Haycraft, William Spanos, and Stefan Tani. Finally, I have drawn from Gilles Deleuze's *Societies of Control* as it is an extension of *Discipline and Punish* and refers to the interpretation that social power no longer 'disciplines' as in the industrial era, but combines the internalization of social expectations, with a control of certain limits. Ballard's novel discusses what could happen when we rebel against these societies of control and how these societies may react to such a betrayal.

2. The Metaphysical Detective Story

The metaphysical detective story, unlike the classical detective story, interrogates narrative, interpretation, subjectivity and the limits of knowledge. According to Dechêne, the "classical" detective story has been defined along the lines of six main propositions:

- (a) there is a crime and there is a criminal;
- (b) a detective is commissioned to investigate;
- (c) the detective is external to the drama;
- (d) the detective investigates;
- (e) the detective finds the criminal and brings him to justice;
- (f) the detective is himself innocent. (2018, p. 178)

Thus, the classical detective narrative begins with a murder or theft and concludes when the criminal's identity and the details of the crime are revealed. The function of the detective is to uncover clues and to innovatively resolve the mystery. The detective's reasoning power, and discovery of hidden details gives rise to the re-establishment of order; generally found at the end of the story. Just like a writer, the detective builds and reconstructs narratives that grants the ability to guide the reader toward an intellectually and emotionally gratifying ending while creating the illusion that the text is actively solving the mystery. As Jeffrey T. Nealon has observed, this process leads to our identification with the fictional detective as "[t]he reader of the detective novel comes, metafictionally, to identify with the detective, because both reader and detective are bound up in the epistemological work of interpretation, the work of reading clues and writing a solution or end" (1996, p. 117). This connection with the detective is continued in metaphysical detective stories; however, the focus has shifted from an epistemological to an ontological focus. Merivale and Sweeney argue that "...the characteristic themes and formal properties of the metaphysical detective story; develops new theoretical frameworks with which to analyze its unsettling effects; and points the way for future investigations of the genre" (1998, p. 1). These novels masquerade as ordered universes, but there is an instability bubbling under the surface.

The ordered and controlled environment described in Ballard's novel is the training ground for the child assassins. In fact, it is "the cold and implacable logic of which they replicate in their murders" (Macsiniuc, 2017, p. 75) that is a reflection of their

existence inside the safe and secure walls of Pangbourne Village. The killers turn out not to be deranged outsiders trying to breach the gated community, but the seemingly innocent, cultivated and cultured inhabitants of the village. Subverting the classic pattern of detective fiction, in which murder interrupts the natural safety and order of a community, Ballard advances the idea that modern anxieties and fears are unavoidable when our desires for safety and control turn our society into a self-imposed prison.

Howard Haycraft in *Murder for Pleasure* (1941) coined the term 'metaphysical detective story'. Rather than attempting to define it, Haycraft employs the term to highlight the difference between Chesterton's Father Brown stories and other classical detective stories. Haycraft discusses Chesterton's stories as a variation on the traditional genre due to their focus on "moral and religious aspects of crime" (Haycraft, 1941, p. 76), which elevated the detective story and provided a "needed and distinctly more 'literary' turn" (Haycraft, 1941, p. 77). Chesterton's stories no longer neatly conform to the protocols of the traditional genre and may even question some of the certainties by which the genre is characterized. In fact, Todorov considers this as the essential element for crossing the boundary of popular fiction and becoming art: "Detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them: to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature'" (Todorov, 2010, p. 43). Metaphysical detective fiction has now become a genre typical for postmodern literature, used for a much wider range of literary works. It would not be possible, however, to deal with metaphysical detective fiction without a recourse to the genre whose conventions it uses and manipulates: the whodunit, or the classical detective story.

William Spanos perceives the metaphysical detective genre to be emblematic of Western positivistic mode of thinking. Western consciousness is, according to Spanos, organized in such a way that all the world's phenomena can be perceived and summed up in terms of specific problems which can be solved (1972, p. 149). The Western world is obsessed with closures, which Spanos exemplifies this by pointing out the strategies involved in writing newspaper articles where reality is often manipulated to fit our need to read a story which is linear, logically structured and, above all, rounded off by a satisfying closure. *Running Wild* resists closure and even events which seem absurd or lack this kind of a straightforward conclusion are turned into well-made fiction. Reality is transformed into a "manageable object, into a fulfilled objective, into an accomplishment" (Spanos, 1972, p. 165). This serves to illustrate the "monolithic certainty that immediate psychic or historical experience is part of a comforting, even exciting and suspenseful well-made cosmic drama or novel – more particularly, a detective story" (Spanos, p. 150). The desire for closure in relation to detective fiction is similarly discussed by Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending* (2000, pp. 19-20). Ballard's novel resists this closure and thus keeps the text open.

The new genre, however, has had its clearest and most comprehensive explanation in Merivale and Sweeney's *Detecting Texts*:

A metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions - such as narrative closure and the detective's role as a surrogate reader - with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot. Metaphysical detective stories often emphasize this transcendence, moreover, by becoming self-reflective (that is, by representing allegorically the text's own processes of composition). (Merivale & Sweeney, 1998, p. 2)

Detecting Texts provides a list of common themes found in Metaphysical Detective stories, which can help us to explore the significance of Ballard's *Running Wild*. One of the themes that Ballard employs to build his narrative is ambiguous evidence and irresolvable theories.

3. Multiple Theories and Unacceptable Interpretations

One of Ballard's approaches to the narrative is to inundate the reader with interpretations, clues and ambiguity in an effort to engage the audience with the detection process. The novel begins with the sub-heading "from the forensic diaries of Dr. Richard Greville, deputy psychiatric adviser, metropolitan police", which introduces the form (a diary) and the narrator. Dr Greville has been called in to help with the investigation. However, the investigation into the massacre has already been pursued by the metropolitan Police and the senior Home Office committee. As a result, the forensic psychiatrist is at a disadvantage, beginning his narrative with exasperation "Where to start?" (Ballard, 1988, p. 4). He goes on to set the context and explain the case as it stands:

So much has been written about the Pangbourne Massacre, as it is now known in the popular press throughout the world, that I find it difficult to see this tragic event with a clear eye. In the past two months there have been so many television programs about the thirty-two murdered residents of this exclusive estate to the west of London, and so much speculation about the abduction of their thirteen children, that there scarcely seems room for even a single fresh hypothesis. (Ballard, 1988, p. 4)

Due to the first-person narrator, there are metafictional references to the imprecise process of documenting the crime. Dr. Greville has a brief and ambiguous epiphany while revisiting the investigation:

Later, looking back as I revise these diaries for publication, I realize that it was there, in the deserted viewing theater, that I was given my first glimpse into the real causes of the Pangbourne Massacre. If I failed to recognize what I saw, and if over the course of my investigation I seem unduly slow to identify the culprits, I can only plead that what now appears self-evident scarcely seemed so at the time. My failure to recognize the obvious, in common with almost everyone else concerned, is a measure of the true mystery of the Pangbourne Massacre. (Ballard, 1988, p. 6)

Ballard examines the distance and perspectives different versions of the crime present. We are introduced to the police report, the home office report, the media coverage and then the police video: “The twenty-eight-minute film was taken by officers of Reading CID soon after eleven o’clock on the morning of June 25, 1988, some three hours after the murders.

Thankfully, there is no soundtrack, and one is glad that none is necessary, unlike the TV programs with their hectoring commentaries full of lurid speculation” (Ballard, 1988, p. 7). The diary takes a literary turn and our narrator discusses the aesthetic sensibilities of the movie taken in the aftermath of the massacre: “This minimalist style of camera work exactly suits the subject matter, the shadowless summer sunlight and the almost blank façades of the expensive houses—everything is strangely blanched, drained of all emotion, and one seems to be visiting a set of laboratories in a high-tech science park where no human operatives are employed” (Ballard, 1988, p. 6). The next six pages of the novel describe the massacre from the cold, indifferent eye of the silent police movie. Each house and corresponding murder scene is captured by the police camera in gruesome detail: “the sequence of entrances, deaths and exits begins to resemble a nightmare exhibition that will never end” (Ballard, 1988, p. 11). It also captures the atmosphere of the village and its neat, controlled and lifeless qualities:

...there is an antiseptic quality about Pangbourne Village, as if these company directors, financiers and television tycoons have succeeded in ridding their private Parnassus of every strain of dirt and untidiness. Here, even the drifting leaves look as if they have too much freedom. Thirteen children once lived in these houses, but it is hard to visualize them at play. (Ballard, 1988, p. 9)

This description introduces one of the motives for the crime that is not considered by any of the early investigations: the controlled upbringing of the children has left them no way to establish their own identities except by embracing criminal savagery.

The next two sections of the novel describe Pangbourne Village in great detail and the victims of the massacre. The location and nature of the village is not considered a motivating factor by any of the original investigators. Dr. Grenville, however, notices the village for what it is, a controlled system. Ballard goes on to describe the village as separate from the outside world: “Pangbourne Village has no connections, social, historical or civic, with Pangbourne itself” (Ballard, 1988, p. 13). The doctor observes the inhabitants of Pangbourne Village as “Secure behind their high walls and surveillance cameras, these estates in effect constitute a chain of closed communities” (Ballard, 1988, p. 14). The wealthy adults (jobs) have cut themselves off from the outside world to protect themselves and their children from its dangers. They have succumbed to the society of control. They believe they have achieved personal freedom as they acquaint freedom with safety, security and sanity. Ballard, however, as quoted in the epigraph to this essay has other ideas: “In a totally sane society, madness is the only freedom” (Ballard, 1988, p. 75). The children seem to be sensitive to their freedom. They begin to see it as a form of control and in response they start to plan their escape.

The intentional segregation from the outside world is not considered a motivating factor for the crime by anyone but Dr. Grenville. This highlights the subjective nature of the investigation and how a crime can be read in a multitude of ways. The original investigators did not consider the location of the crime and the parents’ guiding philosophies to be of relevance. The narrator, however, notices details that were not even considered in the initial reports:

They remain completely apart from their local communities, except for a small and carefully selected underclass of chauffeurs, housekeepers and gardeners who maintain the estates in their pristine condition. Their children mix only with each other at exclusive fee-paying schools or in the lavishly equipped sports clubs sited on the estates. (Ballard, 1988, p. 14)

On the surface, these seem like positive things: rich people living privileged lives. The children are given everything and are showered with love, attention and opportunities. They are completely cut off from the violence, fear and negativity of the rest of the world; they only leave the safety of their cocoons to make money or go to school. They are also safe from the outside world, fortified and ordered and under constant surveillance:

Langbourne Village is remarkable only for having advanced these general trends toward almost total self-sufficiency. The entire estate, covering some thirty-two acres, is ringed by a steel-mesh fence fitted with electrical alarms, and until the tragic murders was regularly patrolled by guard dogs and radio-equipped handlers. Entry to the estate was by appointment only, and the avenues and drives were swept by remote-controlled TV cameras. All police officers concerned in the investigation agree that the penetration of these defenses by a large group of assassins was a remarkable and, as yet inexplicable event. (Ballard, 1988, p. 14)

The report focuses on the difficulty of breaching the security of the village; they are not willing to consider the fact that the threat came from inside. The report then moves on to describe the residents of the village based on “detailed dossiers which the Special Branch had compiled” (Ballard, 1988, p. 14). However, even after an extensive investigation: “The most careful research into the backgrounds of these murdered men and women has failed to reveal any common factor that might prompt a wholesale attack” (Ballard, 1988, p. 17). In addition, the original report found that “All testify that the murder victims were enlightened and loving parents, who shared liberal and humane values which they displayed almost to a fault” (Ballard, 1988, p. 17). The parents also “devoted long hours to their offspring, even to the extent of sacrificing their own social lives. They joined the children in various activities at the recreation club, organized discotheques and bridge contests in which they took full part, and in the best sense were guiding their sons and daughters toward fulfilled and happy lives when they themselves were cut down so tragically” (Ballard, 1988, p. 17). The Pangbourne parents are described as successful role models and enlightened guides.

This description serves to confuse the original investigators. How could these people become targets? Why have they been targeted collectively? What becomes the most obvious and true explanation is beyond the contemplation of the Special Branch; they don't want to consider the possibility of the children as perpetrators. The next section is short and consists of a list of the staff murdered. The section concludes with "All investigation into the Pangbourne Massacre confirms that not a single adult present in the estate on the morning of June 25 survived the murderous half hour which began at approximately 8:23 a.m." (Ballard, 1988, p. 18). The next piece of evidence that Dr. Grenville examines is a picture of the thirteen missing children: "a group of thoughtful and pleasant adolescents smiling out of their school speech-day portraits and holiday snapshots" (Ballard, 1988, p. 18). Appearances, however, can be deceiving. On the surface, these children seem happy, healthy and well adjusted. The reality is something else entirely.

The evidence at the scenes shows that the children didn't disappear until after the murders: "Extensive scuff marks, bloody handprints and shoe impressions that match the children's known shoe sizes indicate that almost all the children were present at the scenes of their parents' murders. However, no traces of their own blood were found, and the children do not seem to have been harmed" (Ballard, 1988, p. 18). The crime according to the initial investigation has two focuses: who committed the murders and where are the children? Dr. Grenville, however, sees another crime, a crime that is more closely associated with the motive and its connection to the missing children.

Thus, Dr. Grenville has experienced multiple versions of the crime scene before visiting the site himself. Before heading to the site, he goes on to read through the police report and its multiple theories. The narrator proceeds to summarize the 'various theories' (Ballard, 1988, p. 19) that have been explored in relation to the massacre. Before Dr. Richard Grenville has entered the investigation the authorities have entertained nine theories: The Lone Assassin, Thrill Killers, A Misdirected Military Exercise, The Political Dimension: Foreign Powers, International Terrorism, Organized Crime, The Parents as Killers, The Domestic Staff, and Bizarre Theories. Moreover, the Bizarre Theories are further broken down into five more possibilities:

A. "A unit of Soviet Spetnaz commandos, targeted on the residential quarters of the NATO headquarters staff at Northwood, received an incorrect war alert order and were parachuted by error into the Pangbourne estate during the night of June 24. They slaughtered the adult residents, assuming they were senior military personnel, then realized their error and abducted the children".

B. "An experimental nerve-gas projectile fell from an RAF or USAF military aircraft into the Pangbourne area and deranged a group of nearby residents, who committed the murders."

C. "The murdered residents and their children were, unknown to themselves, deep-cover agents of a foreign power."

D. "The parents were murdered by visitors from outer space seeking young human specimens." (Ballard, 1988, p. 24)

The final possibility is farfetched and is considered the least likely according to the senior Home Office committee: "The parents were murdered by their own children" (Ballard, 1988, p. 25). Ironically, the final theory turns out to be the correct one. This theory, however, is not acceptable and thus not seriously entertained by the original investigators. Dr. Richard Grenville is chosen because the Home Office Committee have exhausted their possibilities and as they regard him "as a dangerous maverick, overly prone to lateral thinking and liable to come up with one embarrassing discovery after another" (Ballard, 1988, p. 6), he is chosen to take on the investigation.

When Dr. Grenville finally arrives at Pangbourne Village, he is met with further complications and another theory. Granted access to the village and the crime scenes, he soon realizes that his conclusions and theories may not be met with much support by the authorities:

the visit proved more difficult to accomplish than I imagined. Two months may have elapsed since the murders, but popular interest in the tragedy seems even greater now than it was in the days immediately after June 25, fanned by the popular press and by a series of sensational TV documentaries. Last night the BBC's Panorama program even speculated that a group of long-term unemployed from the north of England had come down to the leafy Thames Valley in search of jobs and had been provoked by the ostentatious display of privilege and prosperity into a spasm of murderous rage. (Ballard, 1988, p. 26)

The myriad clues point to a complicated crime. However, Ballard's novel, rather than focusing on the culprits, hints at the contributing factors that have led to the massacre. To gain a better understanding of these factors, we will now turn to Deleuze and his ideas contained in the *Postscript on the Societies of Control*.

4. Societies of Control

In *Societies of Control*, Deleuze extends Foucault's argument of how we are moving from a disciplinary society to a society of control. Through his analysis, Deleuze attempts to predict and explain the consequences of this development. Broadly, Deleuze argues that the disciplinary society is one which is composed of enclosures or 'molds', which essentially casts society as being composed of institutions and spaces with clear-cut boundaries that people would move into, spend the expected amount of time in, and then proceed to move to the next defined space, creating a sense of freedom, or rather an illusion of freedom within the society. According to Deleuze, the overall objective of 'societies of control' is no longer simply to govern deviant behavior in closed environments (e.g., psychiatric hospitals and prisons) but to ensure a regime of unrelentless surveillance in the open spaces of our communities.

Deleuze's essay explores the evolving form and effect of disciplinary processes. Ballard's novel, on the other hand, examines the possible effects of this discipline on individuals and society and how we may detect and respond to it. Ballard's setting for

Running Wild and subsequent crime fiction narratives *Cocaine Nights* (1998b), *Super-Cannes* (2000c), *Millennium People* (2003d), and his last novel, *Kingdom Come* (2006e) are gated communities. These settings highlight the relationship between urban civilization and violent crime, as well as the psychological modifications which occur without the knowledge of the inhabitants themselves in confined places. Protected from external intrusion by “high walls and surveillance cameras” (Ballard, 1988, p. 14) the gated community of Pangbourne Village in *Running Wild* appears to be inhabited by the “new race of people who are content in their little prisons” (Ballard, 1988, p. 16). The families in Pangbourne Village have chosen engineered social segregation in an attempt to protect themselves from the uncertainty of the world. They live in a space of anti-violence and hyper-security, which paradoxically contributes to the massacre. The uncertain conditions of modern life encourage the social withdrawal into homogenous communities, examined by Ballard in his crime fiction narratives. This challenges the very idea of community and highlights the contemporary anxieties of urban civilization.

The residents of Pangbourne Village in *Running Wild* have chosen it to escape the “everyday fear,” of the city which, as Bauman suggests, has reversed its historical role as a shelter against danger, becoming “danger’s principal source” (2007, p. 72). The city represents fear and danger and the gated communities in the suburbs offer sanctuary and safety. Bauman calls this mixophobia, which manifests itself in “the drive towards islands of similarity and sameness amidst the sea of variety and difference” (2007, p. 87). Pangbourne’s community is made up of psychologists, financiers, company executives, successful artists and media tycoons which is a socially sanitized world, where security depends on affordability, and the capacity to “consume” technologies of security. Paradoxically, Pangbourne is designed to keep crime outside of its walls; however, the result is that Pangbourne ends up breeding crime within its own walls. By presenting the crime in this way, Ballard makes a commentary on contemporary surveillance culture, but also alludes to the literary genre of detective fiction.

Pangbourne Village is completely artificial. Although it shares the name of the real Berkshire small town of Pangbourne, there is no connection – “social, historical or civic” (Ballard, 1988, p. 13) – between them. Ballard’s choice of setting highlights its nature as a social experiment and as a simulacrum of community. However, it is also in this sense that its “literary” nature is signaled. The “Village” in Pangbourne Village in its name evokes the classic setting of British detective fiction, as found in Agatha Christie’s novels. These texts are set in a rural village which is safe, secure and stable. Christie uses these settings to contrast order and the disturbance of order in the village community. The choice of the village as the crime setting in many of Christie’s novels highlights the fact that, potentially, any of the members of its closed community is a candidate for the murderer. Ballard’s “village” is a high-tech “prison,” a completely controlled environment, in which the residents live like prisoners. Dr. Richard Greville, the investigator of the mysterious murders, notices the similarity to a prison: “The entire estate [...] is ringed by a steel-mesh fence fitted with electrical alarms, and until the tragic murders was regularly patrolled by guard dogs and radio-equipped handlers. Entry to the estate was by appointment only, and the avenues and drives were swept by remote-controlled TV cameras” (Ballard, 1988, p. 15). The families of Pangbourne Village have truly entered wholeheartedly into the Society of Control.

Dr. Greville’s meticulous coverage of the crime scene at the Maxteds’ house (psychologists) highlights a key moment in the investigation. During the investigation, the life of the children at Pangbourne Village is revealed and the motivations for the massacre start to materialize. Dr. Greville notices the “oddity” of the whole place, which exudes the “sense of very ordered lives being lived here [...] almost too ordered” (Ballard, 1988, p. 37). Every moment of the children’s lives seems to have been accounted for with instructive activities, carefully supervised by parents, and watched on closed-circuit TV. Every corner of the space in which they existed, including their bedrooms, is monitored. The strict control of the children’s time along with the constant surveillance, in the name of safety, functions as an efficient instrument in their education, making the whole village “a warm, friendly, junior Alcatraz,” as Sergeant Payne describes it (Ballard, 1988, p. 41).

Jeremy Bentham’s attempt at the reformation of the penitentiary system on the basis of a simple architectural idea (the circular disposition of the bodies in separate cells) and an optical principle (the existence of a central surveillance tower), never achieved in practice in its author’s time, provided, according to Foucault, a blueprint for the workings of most modern institutions. The Panopticon makes the exercise of power highly efficient, by means of a disciplinary technology relying on constant surveillance. Disciplines, in Foucault’s analysis, are methods by which meticulous control and constant subjection of individuals is achieved, with a view to ensuring their docility and utility (Foucault, 1977, p. 137). Foucault traces the genealogy of disciplinary techniques from the monastic mode to the more modern forms such as the school, the military, the factory, and the hospital. Such methods involve a careful distribution of bodies in space, which “sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed-in upon itself” (Foucault, 1977, p. 141), as well as a strict “control of activity” (Foucault, 1977, p. 149), through the device of the timetable. In Pangbourne Village, the gated community itself constitutes such an enclosure, where the presence and absence of every individual is permanently established by the ubiquitous surveillance cameras; moreover, each of the ten houses had its own internal system of panoptic control, which made children’s physical and emotional privacy practically impossible, in spite of the fact that they had their own space generously allotted in their homes. The control of all their time, through the tightly packed schedules, was another means by which the children’s continuous availability to discipline was ensured. The role of the timetable as a disciplinary procedure, according to Foucault, was, traditionally, to “establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition” (1977, p. 149), operating, in its modern versions, on the principle of exhaustive use. Pangbourne village as the ultimate gated community embodies Deleuze’s idea of Societies of Control by creating “the progressive and dispersed installation of a new system of domination”.

Every activity in Pangbourne Village is established, the wall diaries and bulletin boards, the school reading assignments, the homework reminders, the TV programs to be watched and discussed, the exclusive social events in which both children and parents were taking part – are potential techniques for turning all time into disciplinary time, making the children subjects of an intensive pedagogical project. The children are being controlled not by explicit discipline but through surveillance and timetabling. Interestingly, in order for the children to carry out their plan successfully, their first move is to annihilate the thorough system of surveillance.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Greville notices that all the children's hobbies and recreational activities were marked by their "obsession with the theme of escape," apparently "into a more brutal and more real world of the senses" (Ballard, 1988, p. 69). In *Running Wild*, the desire to escape is itself a crime and receives its inexorable punishment: disappearance, disintegration, and dissolution. The adults' desire to escape the fluid world of uncertainty and danger led them into a prison of their own making, where they meet with the violence they fled from; while the children's attempt to obliterate a "choking" regime of "love and understanding" (Ballard, 1988, p. 65) condemned them to exile to an unmapped social territory of public invisibility. This careful timetabling, however, is exactly what the murderers used to synchronize their crimes and to minimize the time necessary to carry out the acts: "perhaps no more than ten minutes" (Ballard, 1988, p. 57). Another irony is the fact that the crime the children perform displays the same affectless, "technological" rationality as that of the system in which they were inmates. ☹️

The ubiquity of surveillance cameras turns the children's daily lives into a televisual spectacle orchestrated by their parents. The children's existence is mediated and curated by the society of control. In the surveilled and recorded world of their lives in Pangbourne, the details of the children's lives reinforced the idea that nothing but the representable counts. Once outside of the surveillance of the cameras and their parents, the children disappear completely and "vanish through some window in space and time" (Ballard, 1988, p. 4). The Society of Control cannot tolerate invisibility – its efficient working relies on "a principle of compulsory visibility" (Foucault, 1977, p. 187). The awareness of surveillance and the control it exerts on the children forces them to work in secrecy against the system. Out of the gaze of the controlling eye, the Pangbourne children are free to plot their escape.

Running Wild describes these Societies of Control, but it also predicts how different groups will respond to them. The parents embrace the idea and have entered a veritable utopia. The estate itself, in the doctor's further description, "is a masterpiece of refinement, with its clean and noiseless grounds and the desirable combination of money and taste" (Ballard, 1988, p. 30) apparent in its every detail. Even the natural setting – the "finely trimmed" grass, the "immaculate surface" of the lawn (Ballard, 1988, p. 7), the ornamental trees and shrubs – is aestheticized, becoming a figure of social style.

The children follow a very regimented life and are constantly monitored. Every moment of their days is planned out with elaborate schedules and surveillance cameras and parentally installed spyware completes the cycle of control. The children are productive and seemingly well adjusted. Dr Grenville describes one of the children as

"A bright lad," I commented as we looked back from the doorway. "This was a happy child."

"Happy? It was practically compulsory." Payne smiled through a set of tobacco-stained teeth. "With all this gear, anything else would have been a crime." (Ballard, 1988, p. 31)

Ballard highlights the irony of the crime and the fact that the sheltered and privileged lives that the children have experienced is what led to their homicidal acts. The Society of Control has created an artificial world; a world that the Pangbourne children reject and destroy through their violence.

5. Refusing/Rejecting the Solution

Running Wild does not provide us with a clear solution to the crime and leaves the negotiation open, which, in turn, encourages the reader to look at other aspects of the story for significance. In fact, Merivale and Sweeney identify the non-solution as a key theme evident in Metaphysical Detective Fiction: "the absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation...[it] is a maze without an exit (1998, p. 8). This is also supported by Holquist, who argues that "...the metaphysical detective story...is not concerned to have a neat ending in which all the questions are answered, and can [therefore] be forgotten" (Holquist, p. 170).

Ballard's novel does not offer a reassuring solution. In place of the expected objective certainty of completion, he allows for more questions to be raised concerning pressing issues of contemporary civilization. Manipulating the mimetic constraints of the genre, Ballard transforms his take on crime fiction into a mechanism for prophecy. The text, then, becomes a cautionary tale rather than an escapist one. The author attempts to highlight the contradiction we are facing: the controlled system we have created for ourselves and that we expect to watch over and protect us has become the catalyst for the violent tendencies of our children. Thus, the fear of crime will match the mediated consumption of it. Ballard's non-solution outcome in his story allows the criminals to successfully escape punishment, which suggests that the text functions as a warning about the potential threat of the society of control.

Dr Grenville offers his expert, though controversial, evaluation of the crime scene and the clues contained therein: "a brief report of my visit to Pangbourne, in which I described certain curious features, such as the mutilated copy of Piaget's classic text on the rearing of children. The Home Office turned me down, asking me to discontinue my investigation and hold myself indefinitely in reserve" (Ballard, 1988, p. 44). The significance of this rejection is that the crime has a solution, but the Home Office (who have the ultimate say) do not accept the interpretation. The true solution, then, does not exist. As a result of the

rejected solution, the motives are also not further investigated. When the motive is unbelievable, we search for others, “It’s implausible, but our theory is even more unbelievable” (Ballard, 1988, p. 54). Grenville is under no illusion that his discoveries will be rejected by his superiors. This non-solution, however, encourages the reader to focus more on the explanations for the crimes as they are described by the doctor: “The Pangbourne children weren’t rebelling against hate and cruelty. The absolute opposite, Sergeant. What they were rebelling against was a despotism of kindness. They killed to free themselves from a tyranny of love and care” (Ballard, 1988, p. 53). The conclusion that Dr Grenville arrives at disturbs rather than pacifies. As a conclusion, it is unacceptable and thus unresolved. The idea that “the more the children were loved and cherished, the more they were driven into a desperate search for escape” (Ballard, 1988, p. 54) on the surface seems preposterous and not worthy of serious consideration. Dr. Grenville, however, understands why the Home Office would reject his theory: “the inference that she set out to kill him deliberately is so bizarre that one has to look at the possibility of other bizarre theories” (Ballard, 1988, p. 54). The theories entertained earlier were more digestible and agreeable than the possibility of child assassins. The system that had been created at Pangbourne should have been the envy of the nation and not something to fear. Moreover, the media had already hijacked the narrative and the idea of poor orphaned and kidnapped children resonated with the public. Once the story entered the hearts of the general population, there was no turning back: “The suggestion that two of the Pangbourne children were responsible met with strong resistance, both at the Home Office and in the national press. Too much emotional capital had been invested in the notion of the thirteen orphaned children” (Ballard, 1988, p. 71). The media narrative (solution) prevailed, and the true crime is hidden in this conspiratorial simulation.

The novel ends with a non-solution that has the potential to grow and multiply. The Postscript predicts more carnage and bloodshed to come. It also hints at the fact that the motives will continue to be missed:

Will the children strike again? I take it that all authority and parental figures are now their special target. So the regime of kindness and care which was launched with the best of intentions at Pangbourne Village, and which has prompted countless imitations in the exclusive estates of southern England, not to mention Western Europe and the United States, has given birth to its children of revenge, sending them out to challenge the world that loved them. (Ballard, 1988, p. 93)

As a narrator, Dr. Grenville filters his account of the murder investigation through the information at his disposal and his profession as a forensic psychologist. The forensic diaries from which he constructs his narrative are themselves problematic. The contents of these extracts range from systematized information about the Pangbourne residents to the reconstruction of the murders. The discussions between Dr. Grenville and the assisting officer, Sergeant Payne, show the forensic psychologist in an ambiguous light and highlight his progress in the understanding and solving of the mystery. The relationship that develops with the sergeant can be read as a reversal of the Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson coupling. ^[66]

According to Macsiniuc, “As a forensic psychiatrist, Dr. Grenville is a liminal detective figure” (2017, p. 84). He has the detective’s personality, logical skills, sense of observation, speculative rationality and even imagination. However, he also has doubt, disorientation and bias. He takes on the role of the detective but is unable to fulfill the role. The open-ended solution parallels the impossibility of the explanation. In a world where happy and loved children slaughter their parents, there will never be an easy solution. The authorities and the wider community reject the solution because it is too horrible and absurd to imagine.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is apparent that *Running Wild* subverts the tropes of detective fiction to explore Deleuze’s society of control and the effect of unchecked privilege, gated communities and wealth. The gradually increasing de-realization of the children’s lives in the controlled utopia of Pangbourne Village makes them take this extreme stand against their parents and everything they stood for. The home movie that the children create highlights the boredom, tedium, and artificiality of the children’s confined, affluent and secure lives, which can only be interrupted by an extreme violent response. The revelation of the home video as a game plan for the crimes belongs to Sergeant Payne, who believes that the film preceded the murders – implying, in Baudrillardian fashion, that the reality of the murders was created by its video representation, in a strange precession of the image to the real. At its heart, *Running Wild* is a novel about escape: the adults’ desire to escape the fluid world of uncertainty and danger and the children’s escape from a stifling regime of familial love and support. These attempts to escape lead both parties to be condemned: the parents massacred, and the children exiled.

The metaphysical detective story provides Ballard with a framework to interrogate the Pangbourne massacre as well as to highlight the artificial structure of genre. Ballard is in good company as he turns to the detective narrative after decades writing dystopian speculative fiction. Writers such as Haruki Murakami, Roberto Bolaño, Paul Auster, Italo Calvino, and Martin Amis have embraced the sub-genre and, by doing so, have assured its future and demonstrated its flexible application. These authors seem to be saying that we need a new type of detective to read the changing world. Moreover, the detective narrative provides Ballard with a way to investigate the impact of sheltered gated communities and surveillance on identity and behavior. Through his employment of the metaphysical detective tropes, he is able to explore our current world of discipline and control as described by Foucault and Deleuze. Ballard interrogates and exposes our new society of control, but he harbors no illusions about its impacts. There may be a level of safety and freedom in our new society, but at what cost?

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