J.G. Ballard

by Lorenza Pignatti

Lorenza Pignatti: *Your most recently published book,* Super Cannes, *tells the story of a luxury enclave, in which researchers and* managers *from the worlds top multinationals live and* work. *In this residential complex, as in the rest of contemporary society, "work is the new pleasure, " and people spend most of their time there* working. *To what extent do you feel recent developments in Internet and IT have influenced the escalation of this "work dependency"?*

J.G. Ballard: I think that the Internet and new technologies have helped create new work practices and a new work ethic. The whole psychology of work has changed. One's work station in the office—a semi-private space dominated by a computer screen—is the new reality of one's life, since from this position one can access so many different worlds. One's centra) nervous system has been enormously extended by the Internet: we are moving into a kind of non-visual culture, or at least a very different kind of visual culture, far more episodic and discontinuous than that previously presented to the human eye,

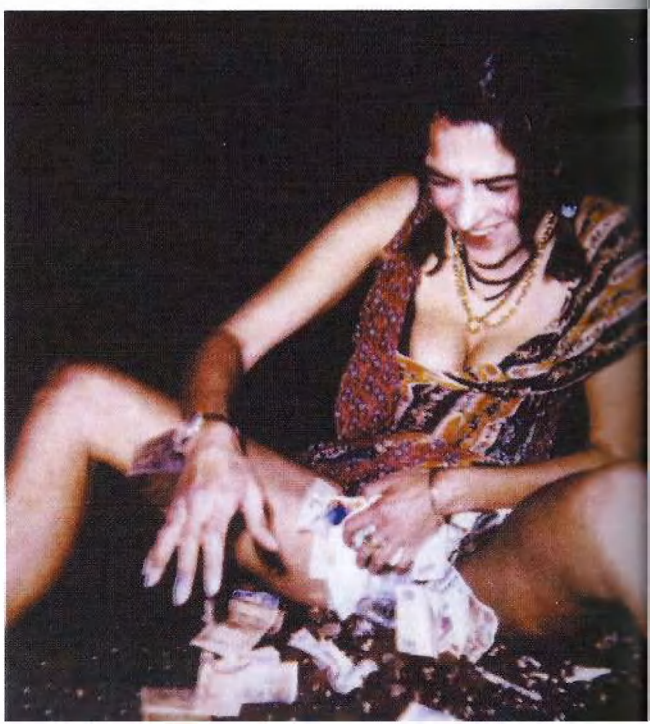
Lorenza Pignatti: *You describe* consumerism as *a form of "suburbanization of the soul, " which can trigger reacttons and impulses in the* psyche *of the individual, It is difficult in contemporary society to* escape *the influence of big multinationals, which have the power to control our lives in an underhand, invisible way. Do these kinds of* "superpowers" *concern you?*

J.G. Ballard: The Western world—Europe, the USA, Japan, Australia—is almost totally suburbanized, Once away from the office, we lead lives of complete boredom and meaninglessness. Religious belief is strong in some areas (the USA), but religious practice is weak. People have become very' passive, leaving everything to TV, the giant corporations, and consumer/entertamment culture, Sooner or later people will rebel against this, probably in the form of senseless violence, There are signs of this already: in football hooliganism and public drunkenness (England), street-gang battles (France), and drive-by shootings (the USA).

Lorenza Pignatti: *Your writings have always been concerned with media events and their diffusion at a global level. Do you think there is anything that could still make an impression on the contemporary collective imagination, given that we are increasingly being bombard by images and information?*

J.G. Ballard: if you mean that we are so over-exposed to media events that nothing can have an impact on us, then my answer is that it is not the great events of politics that touch us now (the Kennedy assassination, the Gulf war), it is the trivial and unimportant events that have the biggest impact—a pop star's new plastic surgery (Michael Jackson), a politician's hair style (Hilary Clinton), a celebrity's eye make-up (Princess Diana). All over the world politicians are trying to involve us with large-scale issues—the European Union, climactic change, poverty in the third world—but we are not interested. Someone should start a political party devoted to line utterly trivial—Madonna's breast implants, Julia Roberts' dental floss, Jennifer

Above: **Tom Wesselmann.** *Bedroom Painting No. 9,* 1969. oil on **canvas** 243,8 x 304,8 cm, Courtesy Tom WesselmannA/AGA, New York,
Below: **Tracey Emin** *Good Smile Great Come,* 2000, C-print, 76 x 78 cm. Courtesy Jay JoplingM/hite Cube, London.



Lopez's new deodorant. Everyone would vote for it.

Lorenza Pignatti: *The paradigm of sci-fi films and literature has altered substantially. It no longer seeks to expound on events in space or on distant planets, but that which is taking place within the contemporary mediascape. What do you think the future of sci-fi will be?*

J.G. Ballard: I have never written Space Opera. Right from the start I pioneered a new form of sci-fi, the New Wave, which was concerned with inner space, not outer. I was interested in the changing psychology of the consumer and media societies.

Lorenza Pignatti: *In an interview published in "The Observer" in 1997, you once stated that "the only form of contemporary architecture not contaminated by kitsch or nostalgia is the airport. " How do you see this affecting our homes?*

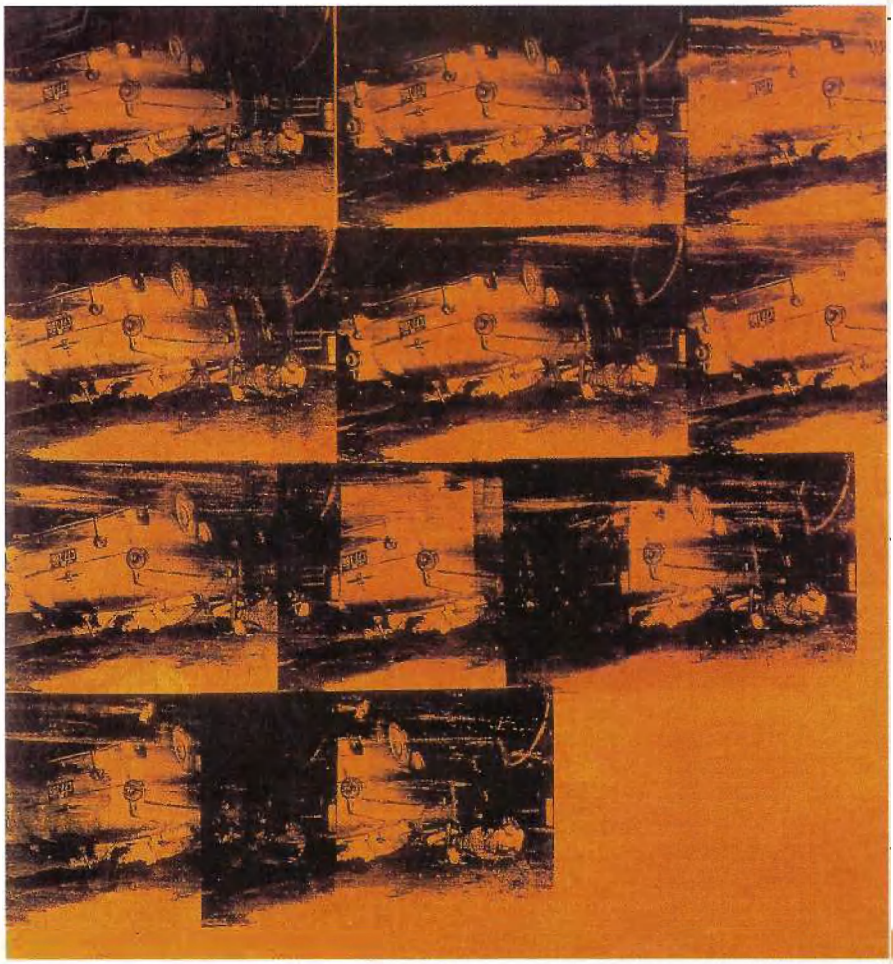
J.G. Ballard: Our homes are slowly turning into TV studios, full of electronic equipment—camcorders, VCRs, advanced stereo systems—designed to make us the star, script-writer, director of our own continuing mini-drama. Reality is turning into a home movie, in which an infanticized version of ourselves runs across a garden of artificial grass.

Lorenza Pignatti: *During the '60s you took an interest in the work of the "Independent Group, " an English art movement which included Reyner Banham, Richard Hamilton, Ed Ruscha, and Eduardo Paolozzi, with whom you also collaborated on the Sci-Fi magazine "New World. " The influence of these artists is quite dear in your book* The Atrocity Exhibition. *Were you also attracted by the work of American pop-artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, or Tom Wesselmann?*

J.G. Ballard: Yes, **I** was very interested in the work of Warhol and Wesselmann, whom I frequently refer to in *The Atrocity Exhibition.* Warhol is a very important twentieth century artist, the first for whom the physical nature of the mass-media photographic image was more important than its content. For Warhol, content meant nothing, which was extremely prophetic of our world today. We watch TV, and flick through magazines filled with images of plane crashes, famines, civil wars, and they mean nothing to us. What we respond to is whether it is a four- or six-page spread, whether the item leads the news or comes second.

Lorenza Pignatti: *Who are the artists that currently grab your attention or with whom you feel an affinity?*

J.G. Ballard: I like Tracey Emin—she has a beautiful body, which is her only idea. She displays her anxiety, boredom, body wastes, sexual heat in a series of ever more desperate and lonely tableaux. She is engaged in a heroic attempt to impose the sordid reality of existence on our media-saturated and brain-dead imaginations.



Andy Warhol, *Orange Car Crash.* 1963, silkscreen ink and acryiic on linen. 219,7 x 208,9 cm. Courtesy GAM, Turin.

J.G. Ballard was *born in Shanghai in 1930. Following the attack on Peart Harbor, he* was *detained* as a *prisoner of war, only returning to England in 1946.* Empire of the Sun, *the autobiographical novel recounting his experience in the prison camp, was turned into a highly successful film directed by Steven Spielberg, while David Cronenberg created the film* Crash *from Ballard's 1973 novel of the same name. His most recent books include:* The Kindness of Women, A User's Guide to the Millennium, Cocaine Nights, *and* Super Cannes. *He lives and works in Shepperton, Great Britain.*