(Un)mapping the Edgelands:

Towards a new genre in contemporary British literature

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Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Circles*

Each city receives its form from the desert it opposes.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Preface

> London is whatever can be reached in a one-hour walk. The rest is fictional.
>
> Iain Sinclair, *Liquid City*[1]

The epigraph above comes from an exchange between author Iain Sinclair and a lost Frenchman in the south London suburb of Shooter's Hill. Surrounded by "funeral streets", "bone pits", and "discreet settlements folding back from hill-ridges", the Frenchman demands "Is this London?" Sinclair concedes that "the question is a brute";[2] his final answer is evidenced in the epigraph. That the margins of London may be fictional is beyond a doubt – but Sinclair's answer is dismissive, an indication of a common conception, both in contemporary literature and contemporary literary and cultural criticism, of the space beyond Sinclair's one-hour orbit.

The following discussion involves spatiality, postcolonial theory, the weird and the quotidian; the texts examined, in style and content, are likewise very different. This breadth of sources and arguments is mainly because no large-scale academic or critical work has to date been written on the subject of edgelands in contemporary literature. And yet, there have always been edgelands: reduced to their semiotic basis, these are the zones between the city

1. Iain Sinclair and Marc Atkins, *Liquid City* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 41.
2. Sinclair and Atkins, *Liquid City*, 40.

and the countryside, where both end, giving way to a third space. It is the *way* this ending is conceived of and theorised that lies at the heart of this thesis. After all, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, there is little space left in the world with which the human has not, in some way, interacted. Susan Sontag rightly asserts that "there is no such thing as empty space. As long as a human eye is looking there is always something to see".[3] Meanwhile, globalisation increasingly threatens to overturn at every stage our metaphors of space, to contract the universe from a hierarchy of meanings to a single, homogenous moment, demarcated by the constricting strategies of late capitalism. Despite the overwhelming pressure of the postmodern condition, however, the edgelands still are a uniquely relational space. They are *liminal*, as liminality is understood by Thomassen: "This limit is not simply there: it is there to be confronted".[4] The edgelands exist on the margins of our collective consciousness, and demand – more than ever in the current moment – a real engagement. How are we to conceive of them, in fiction and fact? What function do the edgelands hold, and how does the human world relate to it?

This thesis approaches the questions set out above not with the goal of providing an ultimate answer or a definite reading, but rather by offering an

3. Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Picador, 2002), 10.
4. Bjørn Thomassen, "Revisiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces," in *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-between*, ed. Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 21.

exploration of these tantalizing spaces in contemporary British literature. The focus on Britain in particular is intentional – it is in Britain that the effects of globalisation and urbanisation have left permanent marks, both on the land and on society; it is also there that the literature of the late modern urban experience has had some of its most famous proponents; it is in the British literary field that the most evocative and ground-breaking advances in the writing of edgeland spaces have been made since the turn of the twenty-first century.

The argument is laid out in five chapters – two introductory, three critical. Chapter One provides a theoretical framework for the discussion, highlighting the vital importance of the spatial turn to the field of literary criticism, and introducing a number of key existing critical approaches which are utilised in the following chapters, and on which the thesis argument will build. Chapter Two prepares the ground for the critical analyses of the next chapters, by providing a preambulatory, as it were, dissection of the edgelands literature genre. It examines texts which influenced the genre, gives an overview of the wide variety of contemporary works which form its textual dimension, and, building on these examples, suggests a taxonomy: a general formal, thematic, and spatial pattern running through all of the noted texts, which unifies and allows for identification of future works as much as for discussion of current ones.

Chapter Three provides an understanding of the edgelands in contemporary British literature before the appearance of Marion Shoard's influential article "Edgelands" transformed the literary and academic understanding of these spaces.[5] An examination of Iain Sinclair's 2002 book *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* from the perspective of theories of non-space, colonial memorialisation, and overwriting, allows this chapter to provide a critique of the general discourse of spatial overwriting and codification as can still be identified in contemporary works.[6] Especially noteworthy is Sinclair's understanding of the edgelands as a space empty of affect and controlled by amnesiac strategies, and his consequent usage of memory and memorial as a method of invasive delineation and bordering of edgeland space.

Chapter Four extends the argument of the previous chapter to Sinclair's 2011 polemic *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project*, and to Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*.[7] In examining the effect that Marion Shoard's essay has had on the

5. Marion Shoard, "Edgelands," in *Remaking the Landscape: The Changing Face of Britain*, ed. Jennifer Jenkins (London: Profile Books), 117-146.
6. Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (London: Granta, 2002).
7. Iain Sinclair, *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), first ed.: London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011; Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011).

field, it argues that a new discourse has developed in the nine years since *London Orbital* first brought contemporary literary attention to the edgelands. Sinclair himself, despite his prior strategies of memorialisation and imperial control, demonstrates himself in *Ghost Milk* to be adaptive and flexible with his philosophy and politics, and provides a politically engaged – albeit exilic – discourse on the value of edgeland spaces, prompted by the very real danger posed to Stratford and the Lea Valley edgelands by the construction project of the 2012 Olympic Games in London. While Sinclair's eventual abandonment of this territory nevertheless limits his ability to celebrate the true character of edgeland space, this goal is passionately taken up by Farley and Symmons Roberts in *Edgelands*, a series of Romantic, essayesque meditations on the edgeland spaces surrounding Manchester and Liverpool. However, despite some real explorations of the edgelands' dynamicity, the project is stymied by their use of nostalgic strategies, which threaten to overwrite the perpetually fluid spatiotemporality of edgeland space. Chapter Four argues that since 2002, the edgelands have become a key focus of a number of works of contemporary British fiction, and while their discursive, political, and psychic power has been recognised, authors remain cautious of allowing the edgelands to wage discourse in their own voices.

Chapter Five deals with *Marshland: Dreams and Nightmares on the Edge of London*, by Gareth E. Rees.[8] An examination of the modes utilised in *Marshland*, including a blending of generic categories; a celebration of the chaotic and resistant nature of the edgelands; and a direct political engagement with the issues facing these spaces in the present time, demonstrates the vitality and contemporaneity of edgelands literature and hints at the future possibilities of the genre as the site of a fully realised and unique textual form. More generally, this final chapter attempts to provide an answer, through the critique of one of the most recent works in the edgelands literature genre, to the open-ended questions suggested above.

In summary: this thesis will argue that the edgelands, due to their unique geographical position – between the globalised hubs of modern cities and the less-inhabited but nevertheless equally human zone of rural land – are a space of resistance and engagement, of fluidity, discourse, and multiplicity. To borrow the discourse of bell hooks, the edgelands, in their perpetual, heterogeneous marginality, are "a space of radical openness".[9] Due to this unique and powerful position, these zones, rather than the city and

8. Gareth E. Rees, *Marshland: Dreams and Nightmares on the Edge of London* (London: Influx Press, 2013).
9. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Between the Lines Books, 1990), 145.

countryside, may be the most important space of contemporary existence – an existence derived as much from the chaotic and creative spaces in-between as from the ordered and rationalised centre.

1. *Compositio loci:* a theoretical and critical introduction

> There is still neither one nor the other, and also perhaps already, both one and the other at the same time. Alarmed, suspended, and balanced in its movement, it recognizes an unexplored space, absent all maps, lacking an atlas, with no voyager to describe it.
>
> Michel Serres, *Atlas*[1]

Edgelands: the space of our time

Marion Shoard's polemic essay "Edgelands" was published in *Remaking the Landscape: The Changing Face of Britain* in 2002.[2] In this seminal text, Shoard gives a clear definition, and a name, to the concept of the edgelands:

> Often vast in area, though hardly noticed, it is characterised by rubbish tips and warehouses, superstores and derelict industrial plants, office parks and gypsy encampments, golf courses, allotments and fragmented, frequently scruffy, farmland. All these heterogeneous elements are arranged in an unruly and often apparently chaotic fashion against a background of unkempt wasteland frequently swathed in riotous growths of colourful plants, both native and exotic.[3]

Shoard's goal in "Edgelands" is revisionist and progressive – she calls upon her

1. Michel Serres, *Atlas* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), 24.
2. Shoard, "Edgelands," 117-146.
3. Shoard, "Edgelands," 117.

readers to turn their attention to this liminal zone, writing that "instead of seeing the interface as a kind of hellish landscape to be shunned, we should celebrate it".[4] Her demand is driven by what she believes to be the untapped potential of the edgelands: "town and country may show us the surface of life with which we feel comfortable, but the interface shows us its broiling depths. If people were encouraged to understand this world more, they might feel less alienated and puzzled by the circumstances of their lives".[5] While Shoard also celebrates the natural features of the edgelands and calls for conservation efforts to turn their attention to this zone's unique habitats, it has been her intellectual and moral call to arms that has been taken up widely in the social sciences, literature, and the public eye. There seems to be a hunger in contemporary discourse for the liminal, and Shoard's term has quickly taken on a second, metaphoric definition of any interfacial or liminal region, whether it be spatial or theoretical.[6]

It must be noted that Shoard and her followers have hardly operated in a semiotic vacuum. Many alterative terms for the edgelands have been posited

4. Shoard, "Edgelands," 142.
5. Shoard, "Edgelands," 142.
6. For articles employing the term in metaphoric ways, see: F. Rapport, P. Wainwright and G. Elwyn, "The view from the edgelands," *Medical Humanities* 30, no. 5 (2004): 5-6; Dani Abulhawa, "Female Skateboarding: Re-writing Gender," *Platform* 3, no. 1 (2008): 56-72; Janet Batsleer and Jenny Hughes, "Looking from the Other Side of the Street: Youth, participation and the arts in the edgelands of urban Manchester," in *Design in the Borderlands*, ed. Eleni Kalantidou and Tony Fry, 156-172. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

by a variety of writers. James Bird, writing in 1977, indicates that the question "Where does the city end?" has been a "problem familiar to urban geographers" since as early as 1937.[7] Shoard herself notes that Alice Coleman, an influential academic in the field of land utilisation, coined the term "rurban fringe" in a 1960s geographical survey.[8] American urban theorist Joel Garreau posited "edge city" for a similar concept.[9] Bertrand Westphal notes "outer cities, edge cities, technopole, technoburbs, silicon landscapes, postsuburbia, and the metroplex".[10] Edward W. Soja's neologism is "exopolis".[11] Alan Berger posits "drosscape",[12] while Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts add to the list a further fifty or so terms.[13] The general terms "interfacial zone", "rural-urban interface", "peripheral zone" and "marginal zone" have been much used.[14] For all this vast proliferation of terms – a proliferation which can only suggest that contemporary thought is desperately searching for an inclusive,

7. James Bird, *Centrality and Cities* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 101-2.
8. Shoard, "Edgelands," 134.
9. Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), xxi-xxii.
10. Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 160.
11. Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 238-39.
12. Alan Berger, *Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).
13. Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 3-4.
14. For a recent overview of terms in both literature and the geographical sciences, see also: C. Michael Hall, "The ecological and environmental significance of urban wastelands and drosscapes," in *Organising Waste in the City: International perspectives on narratives and practices*, ed. María José Zapata Campos and C. Michael Hall (Bristol: Policy Press, 2013), 22-26.

yet ultimately non-prescriptive term for this newly vital spatiality – Farley and Symmons Roberts concede that Shoard's "edgelands" has the right mix of description and potential, an inarguable *edginess*.[15] And if popular opinion has a bearing on critical vocabulary – and so it should, for what is critique without audience – then "edgelands", since the publication of Farley and Symmons Roberts' book, has certainly won out. The oracular tool of a simple Google search finds relevant hits in major newspapers, personal blogs, academic articles, photography portfolios, poetry competitions, and even music albums, almost all related to Shoard's usage of the term. It has therefore become apparent that the current breadth and depth of attention paid to edgelands is such that they can no longer be contained to a single textual form, theoretical framework or social foundation, and it is therefore necessary within the current moment to give shape to a rapidly accreting new genre, that of *edgelands literature*.

Towards the spatial turn in literary theory

The identification of a common thread between seemingly disparate literary works, and the analysis of key texts among them as the generative agents, over the last decade, of a new genre of literature, is closely aligned with the *spatial turn* in the humanities and the social sciences, a positioning of spatiality as a

15. Farley and Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands*, 5.

vital discursive strategy in theory and criticism. Much has been written on the historical context and implications of the spatial turn, but some preliminaries are worth repeating if only to better reveal the context within which this thesis is situated.

From the birth of modernist thought until after the Second World War, cultural theory was, in the main, led by the discourses of *temporality*, a mode of thinking championed by a variety of philosophers and writers such as Georg Hegel, Mikhail Bakhtin, Henri Bergson, and Marcel Proust. Post-war theorists who began to move away from temporality and towards spatial frameworks included Gaston Bachelard, whose concept of *topoanalysis*, "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives",[16] was a forerunner of more broad-ranging spatial discourse. The anthropologist Victor Turner, responding to the earlier work of Arnold van Gennep, similarly noted the importance of space – particularly liminal space – for the enactment of initiation rites and other socialising ceremonies in premodern societies.[17] However, it was in the 1970s that the spatial turn gained true prominence in the work of a number of French scholars. The most highly regarded of these conceptions of space are Michel Foucault's *heterotopias*, Henri Lefebvre's *production of space*,

16. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 8.
17. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), 93.

and Michel de Certeau's *critique of everyday life* (building on Lefebvre), all of which at their core emphasise the importance of space to political thought and power relations, and jointly provide a critique of late capitalist social relations, especially within the field of urban space.[18]

Following in the wake of the French poststructuralists, space became ever more important to the social sciences. Jean Baudrillard's highly influential theory of *hyperreality*, while applicable to all the overarching functions and structures of the modern condition, took its motive from the places of postmodernity – specifically those places which were merely illusions or simulations of the real, such as Disneyland and the sets of reality TV shows, both, it should be noted, often located in the edgelands.[19] The *third space/thirdspace* theories of Homi K. Bhabha and Edward W. Soja connected space not only with the discourses of hegemonic power, but with the resistance proposed to it by a postcolonial reading of space.[20] In the 1990s, Fredric Jameson identified the overwhelming trend in contemporary thinking towards space as constructive and central to theory, and linked it explicitly with postmodernism,

18. Michel Foucault, "Des Espace Autres [Of Other Spaces]," *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46-49; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkley: University of California Press, 2011).
19. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation,* trans. Sheila Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
20. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden: Blackwell, 1996).

with which it has remained closely associated.[21] The wide-ranging uses of postmodern spatiality have recently been *re*apprehended by the field of geography, with Doreen Massey's seminal argument in favour of the vanishing distinction between place and space in contemporary culture being especially relevant in this regard.[22] Within this broadening of application over the last sixty years, spatiality has become one of the dominant discursive tools made available for contemporary thinkers.

An oft overlooked and early instance of the spatial turn, combining avant-garde art, spatiality, psychology, ludic tropes, and political resistance, is *psychogeography*. This approach to geography, especially the geography of urban spaces, was described in 1955 by the French philosopher Guy Debord as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals".[23] The main mode of a psychogeographical study was the *dérive*, defined by Debord as "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances", in other words, a walk or "drift" through urban space with the express aim of revealing its underlying "psychogeographical contours" – the emotional, psychical and sensory spatial characteristics that form the basis of

21. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 154-80.
22. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005).
23. Guy Debord, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography," trans. Ken Knabb, *Les Lèvres Nues* 6 (1955).

psychogeographical investigation, and thus set it apart from more traditional studies of space.[24]

Due to its capacity for disrupting the systems of late capitalism by observing the individual's psychological comprehension of space at a micro level, rather than macro-scale spatialities such as empire, colony, and globalised space, psychogeography became a central concept within the avant-garde revolutionary movement, the Situationist International, of which Debord was a founding member. However, during the decade following the publication of "Theory of the Dérive", the SI – and Debord himself – moved away from an artistically subversive philosophy and towards active political rebellion against late capitalism, culminating in the May 1968 insurrections in France, and psychogeography and the *dérive* became less relevant to their aims.[25]

In the 1990s the original precepts of the SI found purchase in a growing number of international psychogeographical organisations, one of the most prominent of which was the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA), whose rise and fall is detailed by Alastair Bonnett.[26] Apart from the LPA, a number of other psychogeographical organisations have operated within the

24. Guy Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," trans. Ken Knabb, *Internationale Situationniste* 2 (1958).
25. For more on the history of the SI, see: Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999).
26. Alastair Bonnett, "The Dilemmas of Radical Nostalgia in British Psychogeography," *Theory Culture Society* 26, no. 45 (2009): 45-70.

United Kingdom in the last twenty years, including the Manchester Area Psychogeographic group (MAP) and the Leeds Psychogeography Group, which is still active.[27] The longstanding associations in the British literary scene with psychogeography, especially in the work of a number of seminal authors who will be discussed further in this chapter, make contemporary British literature a fertile ground for uncovering and examining edgeland spatialities, due to the implicit links between edgeland space, psychogeographical modes, and theoretical discourses of the spatial turn, such as structures of power, map-territory relations, and the presence of the subject in the landscape.

There is therefore no doubt that the spatial turn, especially in its psychogeographic and avant-garde realisations, has had an important influence on British literature, and especially on the literature under examination in this thesis. In the domain of literary criticism, however, the floodgates have only very recently been opened – partly, perhaps, due to a hesitancy on the part of literary theory to adopt the strategies of outside theorists, and partly because the structuralist drive of the originators of the spatial turn has itself limited this fruitful crossover. Lefebvre, for whom space was "whole and broken, global and fragmented, at one and the same time",[28]

27. See: "Manchester Area Psychogeographic," accessed October 2014, http://www.twentythree.plus.com/MAP/; "Leeds Psychogeography Group," accessed October 2014, http://www.schizocartography.co.uk/leeds-psychogeography-group/.
28. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 355-56.

in turning to literature, warned that "when codes worked up from literary texts are applied to spaces – to urban spaces, say – we remain, as may easily be shown, on the purely descriptive level", a level which reduces "space itself to the status of a *message*, and the inhabiting it to the status of a *reading*".[29] So, literary theory remained for decades, with very few exceptions, an extraspatial discipline. Despite a movement in the 90s towards *ecocriticism*, an examination of "writing that focuses on *place* … that examines and invites intimate human experience of place's myriad ingredients",[30] and so looks past the Derridean conception of text as text with no outside referent, it is the recent movement of *geocriticism* which is proving most fruitful and vital as an awakening for literary theory.

Over the last decade, geocriticism has been pioneered in the European tradition by Bertrand Westphal, and in the USA by Robert T. Tally Jr. Westphal describes geocriticism foremost as an interdisciplinary field, taking cues from "literary studies, geography, urbanism and architecture, with pathways to sociology and anthropology".[31] It is by nature outward-looking, taking space as its primary subject, rather than focusing on the Self/Other relation which has preoccupied literary theory for the last decades. Furthermore, and perhaps with

29. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 7.
30. Allison B. Wallace, "What is Ecocriticism?" *Defining Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, accessed October 2014, http://www.asle.org/site/resources/ecocritical-library/intro/defining/wallace/.
31. Bertrand Westphal, foreword to *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), xiv.

the goal of avoiding further limitations as its purview expands, Westphal underscores that geocritical writing should be *polysensous*, diversifying critique to include not only sight, but all senses, and *spatiotemporal*, by locating place in "a temporal depth in order to uncover or discover multilayered identities" and highlight "temporal variability of heterogeneous spaces".[32] It is this critical doorway, with its inherent multiplicities and its readiness to embrace polysemy and heterogeneity beyond cultural frameworks, which will be the theoretical touchstone of this thesis.

The greatest potential for geocritical exploration is certainly in the domain of the liminal and marginal, where meanings are already definitionally fluid and heterogeneous. While there has, to date, been scant work within the geocritical field on edgelands and associated spaces, the instability and semiotic fluidity of the urban-rural divide has, for instance, been highlighted by Adam McKee in relation to Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.[33] Westphal himself asserts that "world literature", as a key textual form of the contemporary mode, should be "wholly universal and freed from any discrimination between supposed centres (they have always been plural) and peripheries".[34] In giving the borderland an importance equal with that which is

32. Westphal, foreword to *Geocritical Explorations*, xiv-xv.
33. Adam McKee, "Eternal Return and the City/Country Dynamic in Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*," *Reconstruction* 14, no. 3 (2014).
34. Westphal, foreword to *Geocritical Explorations*, xiii.

beyond it, the liminal area is semiotically identified – even while this identification is polysemous – or, to have it another way, *placed*.

This concept of place infusing space with meaning, much as Saussure's *parole* would construct and delineate a section of the universally present *langue*, is asserted by Tally: "after all, a *place* is only a place because of the ways in which we, individually and collectively, organise space in such a way as to mark the topos as special, to set it apart from the spaces surrounding and infusing it".[35] Such a strategy of forming place coexists with the theories of Massey, who rejects the "modern, territorial conceptualisation of space" which "understands geographical difference as being constituted primarily through isolation and separation … first the differences between places exist, and then those differences come into contact". Massey's revisionist alternative, influenced by thinkers such as Bhabha and Soja, theorises space:

> as an emergent product of relations, including those relations which establish boundaries, and where 'place' in consequence is necessarily *meeting* place, where the 'difference' of a place must be conceptualised more in the ineffable sense of the constant emergence of *uniqueness* out of (and within) the specific constellations of interrelations within which that place is set … and what is made of that constellation.[36]

35. Robert T. Tally Jr., translator's preface to *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces,* by Bertrand Westphal (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), x.
36. Massey, *For Space*, 68.

In the way that Massey and the geocritics suggest, then, this thesis will treat liminal and marginal spaces generally, and the edgelands in particular, as a dialogue between the Self and the Other, between a simultaneous multiplicity of spatial readings, and as a balance between heterogeneous theoretical stances – precisely this is the "multiplicity of possible worlds" which Michel Serres implores us to chart.[37] In and of themselves, the edgelands are a product of the modern condition, and it is with the discursive tools of the modern condition – new spatial modes – that they shall be read.

Extended spatialities: non-place and thirdspace

As noted above, Westphal and Tally have recognised the importance of liminal space for geocriticism, even if their practical application of it has to date been limited. Both have noted the importance to their work of the theories of Marc Augé's *non-places* and Bhabha's *third-space* cum Soja's *thirdspace*. These theoretical digressions from the traditional binary conception of space as outside/inside are closely tied in with postmodern, poststructuralist, and postcolonial cultural theory.

In *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Augé asserts that "a place which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with

37. Serres, *Atlas*, 276.

identity will be a non-place"[38] created by the systems of supermodernity, the hyper-globalised and hyperreal universe of the contemporary mode. For Augé, non-places include airports, hotel chains, tourist havens, supermarkets, and transport networks – all edgeland fixtures. They are the "invasion of space by text",[39] a dynamic of pure referentiality with nothing but the spectacle on which to anchor itself, creating in its inhabitants (though they can never truly be inhabitants) "neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude".[40] Non-places are the ultimate postmodern spatiality. Augé's thesis is compelling and irrefutable if only because of the volume and calibre of work it has inspired since its publication, yet what Augé sees in the edgelands are not the *only* places in the edgelands. As an endlessly interrelational and discursive space, the edgelands contain all: the monumental simulacra of supermodernity; the traditional spaces derived from memory and meaning which are simply called *places*; and *thirdspace,* as defined by Bhabha and Soja – the trialectic spatiality within which an escape from both place and non-place can be effected.

The epigraph to this chapter, from Serres' *Atlas*, refers to thirdspace –

38. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2008), 63.
39. Augé, *Non-Places*, 80.
40. Augé, *Non-Places*, 83.

rather than being the final and reductive limit of reference, this spatiality is "both one and the other at the same time". Homi K. Bhabha neologised "third space" as a "new international space of discontinuous historical realities",[41] but it was Soja who so symbolically removed the space between the words, writing:

> *Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history.[42]

While it may seem that, in being so inclusive, thirdspace loses all possible meaning, Soja's assertion is that any thirdspace must be articulated as a *trialectic*, a third argument extended from an existing binary (Self/Other, Traveller/Landscape), which contextualises it while allowing a freedom to explore the manifold possibilities produced when existing paradigms are destroyed.[43] By nature, thirdspace is liminal: it cannot exist anywhere but between or beyond prior places. The edgelands, then, are a thirdspace: neither city nor countryside, neither inhabited nor wild, neither clearly delineated by history and memory, nor a hyperreal simulacrum.

41. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 217.
42. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 56-7.
43. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5-6.

Conclusions

The edgelands are not a limit, but a beginning of a far more "disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving, unfixed" conceptualisation of possible space.[44] Marion Shoard is right in demanding a greater understanding of the edgelands, for it is in the heterogeneous discourses of thirdspace – the natural progression of the spatial turn – where the complexity of the modern condition can be best articulated, and it is undoubtedly high time to utilise this form of spatiality in a critical approach towards the myriad realisations of edgelands literature.

44. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 70.

2. From theory to text: the edgelands literature genre

> The city is inside out, upside down. After losing its centre, after abetting its own processes of blurring, its essential marginalization, it today becomes analogous to the text, with deconstruction lying in wait… at least, where it is not already at work.
>
> Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism*[1]

Preludes

While it was undoubtedly Shoard who both neologised and articulated the concept of the edgelands, weaving together the disparate strands of their manifestations at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a look further back reveals earlier renderings of concomitant ideas – preludes to the edgelands literature genre. The earliest articulation of edgeland spaces in English-language literature comes from Henry David Thoreau's seminal transcendentalist work *Walden* (1854). Resolving "to live a year as an urban-edge squatter"[2] in an edgeland area of Boston, Thoreau describes the natural, topographical, and human features of Walden Woods. Far from being an untouched idyll, Walden Woods are revealed by Ronald Wesley Hoag to be an edgeland space: thinly forested, close to a major road junction and a railway

1. Westphal, *Geocriticism*, 162.
2. Chris Sellers, "Cities and Suburbs," in *A Companion to American Environmental History*, ed. Douglas Cazaux Sackman (Chichester: Blackwell, 2010), 473.

line, and "a home to those Concordians who found or placed themselves on the fringes of the community".[3]

As the twentieth century progressed, urban fringe landscapes became more topical in literature, keeping pace with expanding urban environments and the rise of a globalised society. These early works feature remarkably diverse manifestations of the edgelands, which are all, however, linked by their usage of these spaces as a setting for authorial agendas. Key works within this loose association of texts include Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's 1972 Soviet sci-fi novel *Roadside Picnic* and its 1979 film adaptation, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, both featuring the Zone, a chaotic marginal landscape of alien affect; the 1970s novels of seminal British author J.G. Ballard, especially *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), *Crash* (1973) and *Concrete Island* (1974), which focus on the violent dissipation of human culture and society in outer suburbia; W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn: An English Pilgrimage* (1995, trans. 1998), a hybrid, contemplative work of history, memoir, and travel writing; and Richard Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside* (1973), a work of nature writing which explored previously overlooked British spaces, including the rural-urban fringe, positioning them, however, as a manifestation of rural landscape, rather than as a space in their own right. The sheer variety of styles, themes and

3. Ronald Wesley Hoag, "Walden, The Place," accessed October 2014, http://thoreau.eserver.org/waldenplace.html.

approaches to the edgelands discernable in these works highlights the flexibility of edgeland space, and its long-term impact on literature.

A special mention must be made of Ballard. Widely considered to be the godfather of contemporary urban writing, his influence in the British literary field over the last forty years is highly significant – indeed, the adjective *ballardian* has now come into general usage, defined by the *Collins English Dictionary* as "resembling or suggestive of the conditions described in Ballard's novels and stories, esp. a dystopian modernity, bleak man-made landscapes, and the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments".[4] Ballard's opinion of life in the modern suburbs of London was, in the main, unremittingly cynical, celebrating quasi-edgeland spaces not for their manifest potentiality, but for the abject view of humanity that they offered. His philosophy, heavily associated with 1970s surrealist and post-fascist reactions to globalisation and consumerism, focused on the spatial manifestations of "the 'Death of Affect', the loss of emotional engagement with our surroundings".[5] While Ballard's input into the field needs acknowledgement, and a number of edgeland authors cite his influence on their work, his conception of the edgelands is nevertheless ill-suited for application to these spaces in their contemporary realisation.

4. *Collins English Dictionary*, 10th ed. (London: HarperCollins, 2010), s.v. "Ballardian."
5. Merlin Coverly, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010), 112.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, with the legacy of Ballard and other modern-era authors becoming increasingly distant, the edgelands have become newly apprehended in a unified and identifiable form, with more recent works foregrounding a multiplicity of styles and theoretical approaches, treating fringe areas not as a setting, but a central subject of discourse. There has been a marked swell of publications within the last three years connected in some way to liminal, fringe, and otherwise hitherto overlooked spaces, to the point where a *liminal turn* can be said to have occurred in British literature, both popular and academic. Perhaps the best example of this paradigmatic turn – from the classical spatial subjects of cities, suburbs, the countryside, forests and wildernesses, towards subversive spaces such as edgelands, underground locations, coastlines, housing estates and land surrounding major transport infrastructures – is the recent proliferation in major London bookstores such as Waterstones and Foyles of entire sections devoted to such texts.

Key authors writing within the liminal turn include Will Self, whose particular brand of psychogeographic practice, manifested most clearly in *Psychogeography: Disentangling the Modern Conundrum of Psyche and Place* (2007), is closely aligned with the original Situationist International and its treatment of space as being inherently psychological and political; Nick Papadimitriou, whose book *Scarp: In Search of London's Outer Limits* (2012) is a deep topography

of a section of outer North London, a journey both into the psyche of the arsonist-turned-author, and the minutely detailed spatiality he describes; and filmmaker Patrick Keiller, whose trilogy of Robinson films (*London* (1994), *Robinson in Space* (1997), *Robinson in Ruins* (2010)), each tracing an increasingly wider circle around London, has been highly influential on depictions of the edgelands, their hidden narratives and psychogeographical contours. A number of other books, including Owen Hatherley's *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (2010), Peter Ackroyd's *London Under: The Secret History Beneath the Streets* (2011), Ed Glinert's *The London Compendium: A Street-by-Street Exploration of the Hidden Metropolis* (2004, expanded 2012), John Rogers' *This Other London: Adventures in the Overlooked City* (2013), and Alastair Bonnett's *Unruly Places: Lost Spaces, Secret Cities, and Other Inscrutable Geographies* (2014), all point to the recent cementation of psychogeographic modes and liminal spaces in the popular cultural consciousness.

Key texts

In *Geocriticism*, Westphal provides a sympathetic challenge for the aspiring critic: "the first problem that geocritical enterprise must resolve lies in the scattering of sources. … a great deal of patience, and a certain amount of scholarship, will be indispensable in forming a corpus necessary for a fully

geocritical analysis".[6] To discern the key texts within the fledgling genre of edgelands literature, it is necessary to discover which of them rise above both their avant-garde roots and their contemporary popular-cultural milieu, and utilise edgeland spaces neither solely to appeal to a mass market, nor solely to theorise on socio-spatial configurations without applying them to the real world. Texts which show the greatest promise within the edgelands literature genre feature a contemporary understanding of edgeland spaces, a willingness to explore their full potential (whether or not this potential is entirely realised), and an understanding of the theories and strategies from which they have developed. I have identified Iain Sinclair's *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (2002) and *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* (2011), Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' *Edgelands: A Journey Into England's True Wilderness* (2011), and Gareth E. Rees' *Marshland: Dreams and Nightmares on the Edge of London* (2013) as highly vital and influential texts, which not only provide a shape and form to the genre they have been instrumental in generating, but which also, when examined together, offer a diachronic view of the conceptualisation of the edgelands in British literature since the turn of the century.

6. Westphal, *Geocriticism*, 117.

Taxonomy

This thesis hopes, in a small way, to rise to Westphal's challenge, by identifying the key writers above as forming the true genesis of the edgelands literature genre. It is therefore important to draw out those features which are shared between these texts, and thereby connect and systematise them within the genre. This discussion will not labour over the definition of genre in contemporary literary theory, merely noting that Fredric Jameson apprehended genre, in the words of Michael Sinding, as "mediating between literary and social history … radically open but subject to determination by historical or discursive forces",[7] a theory derived in critical dialogue with poststructuralist philosophers such as Derrida and Foucault, and repeated in bell hooks' assertion of the "radical openness" of the margin as the location of subversive thought. This definition of genre as a negotiation between prior systems, and therefore as permeable and referentially fluid, organically reflects the conception of the edgelands as a heterogeneous thirdspace. The edgelands deserve and belong in a fluid, contemporary genre of their own.

With this aim, a guide to the recurring elements of edgelands literature is provided below, structured, for clarity, in the form of a list:

7. Michael Sinding, "After Definitions: Genre, Categories, and Cognitive Science," *Genre* 35, no. 2 (2002): 184. See also: Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 134-5, 240, 300-1, 371.

1. *Formal flexibility*. As a genre which embraces fluidity and multiplicity, edgelands literature is defined by a natural heterogeneity of form. Publishers have struggled with appropriate categorisations of edgelands texts – Farley and Symmons Roberts' *Edgelands* is classed by Jonathan Cape as "Literature/Travel writing"; Sinclair's *London Orbital* by Penguin as "Travel writing", while Granta declines to give it a classification, as does Influx Press with Rees' *Marshland*. In an article for *The Quietus*, Rees notes that there exists "a category of work in which the fusion of fictional and non-fictional forms is not an experiment but a fundamental mode of communication: a key to accessing a deeper truth about human existence". Citing a coterie of authors whose work refuses to be demarcated by simplistic formal and generic categories (including his own), Rees claims that since human experience of place is "historical, geographical, topographical, sonic, visual, emotional, anecdotal, and many other things besides", readers and authors should "ditch the labels altogether and embrace that uncategorisable writing which lingers outside the walled garden of literary fiction".[8] Edgelands literature is unquestionably part of this trend.

8. Gareth E. Rees, "Writing a Deep Map: Non-Fiction's Challenge to the Contemporary Novel," *The Quietus*, November 24, 2013, accessed October 2014, http://thequietus.com/articles/13961-deep-map-gareth-rees-marshlands.

2. *Psychogeographic modes*. Naturally, the space of the edgelands lies at the definitional centre of the texts associated with it. The agent of much edgelands literature is not the human, but the constant interplay between the human and the landscape, between mind and space. In favouring a narrative built from the psychological effects of space on the traveller, this genre seeks to put *discourse* at the forefront – as is characteristic of the most creative of psychogeographical explorations – rather than any single agent or even any single space.
3. *Transgressivity*. In *Geocriticism*, Westphal writes: "Transgression is not just crossing porous boundary lines. It assumes a closed and striated space and a will to penetrate, which the state apparatus … establishes as a form of burglary".[9] By nature, the edgelands are liminal – they only ever exist on the margins of the urban, and are rarely permanently inhabited except by marginal figures such as sex workers and Romanichals, and so, any journey there is a border crossing, a transgression. The importance of transgressive movement in edgelands literature is evident from the subtitles of a number of books in the genre: Papadimitriou's *Scarp: In Search of London's Outer Limits*; Sinclair's *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25*; Farley and Symmons Roberts' *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*; W.G. Sebald's *The*

9. Westphal, *Geocriticism*, 42.

Rings of Saturn: An English Pilgrimage. Furthermore, the edgelands are the location of Augé's non-places and Baudrillard's simulacra, the foundations of supermodernity. In adopting the strategies of psychogeography, and in exploring spaces perceived by the literary establishment as the domain of low culture (or absent culture), the edgelands genre subverts and resists the goals of late capitalist society.

4. *Relational author*. The edgelands genre is paradoxical in that it favours the spatial over the human, and yet, due to its close links with the reflexive strategies of psychogeography, the author or narrator of an edgelands text can never be far away from the space within which they are travelling (transgressing). Authorial perception seems to dominate the text, and so, eclipses the space itself. A solution is proposed by geocriticism: in putting space at the centre of its argument, this critical mode shifts the author or narrator to the position of the Other, thereby bringing together "a series of representations of the Other, an Other to be embraced in its relation to the space within which it operates".[10] This Other does not have the classical relation of space to traveller – it is not monological or stative, but relational, and governed by interaction. This relationality is reminiscent of the argument of thirdspace in its breaking down of Self/Other and

10. Westphal, *Geocriticism*, 116-117.

Traveller/Landscape binaries. Furthermore, when a group of texts is examined together, as in a genre formation, singular relationalities are avoided in favour of a polyphonic discourse: "There is no doubt that if the space is perceived and represented by more than one writer, it will be recentered (thus, geocentred)",[11] concludes Westphal. This recentered *Weltanschauung* is at the heart of the edgelands and their text.

Conclusions

The genre of edgelands literature is perhaps the most vital of our spatially oriented and poststructuralist times. In embracing the inherent potentiality of edgeland space, and in positioning it as the discursive centre of a number of contemporary texts – texts defined by stylistic flexibility, transgressivity, disruptive strategies such as those of psychogeography, and the dissolution of binaries and boundaries in favour of a trialectic discourse – it heralds the genesis, in both literary theory and literary text, of a forward-focused and radically explorative mode of thought. In the following three chapters, a close critical analysis of key texts in this genre will demonstrate the methods by which the constellations of its meanings have coalesced, and – it is hoped – defend its vitality and worth for works yet to come.

11. Westphal, *Geocriticism*, 117.

3. Overwriting: *London Orbital's* edgeland imperialism

> I've no idea why the psychogeographer crossed the road but I bet when they got there they found Iain Sinclair had already written about it.
>
> Author unknown[1]

The influence of Iain Sinclair on contemporary British fiction is not to be understated. In their introduction to *City Visions: The Work of Iain Sinclair*, Robert Bond and Jenny Bavidge describe him as "our major poetic celebrant of the city's hidden experience, its myths and subcultures".[2] Robert Macfarlane deems him a "national treasure … among the most written-about of contemporary British authors".[3] The cover quotes of his books speak for themselves. The critical corpus on Iain Sinclair is likewise large, and has grown considerably in the ten years since Robert Bond bemoaned the "failure of critical surveys of contemporary writing to so much as recognise the existence

1. As much as leaving this epigraph unexplained would be in keeping with Sinclair's unapologetically allusive style, the source is the website of Tina Richardson, a Leeds-based psychogeographer. Her 2012 Easter cards, inscribed with the message "Why did the psychogeographer cross the road?", received a variety of responses, one of which was the above. 2012. Accessed October 2014. http://particulations.blogspot.com.au/2012/04/why-did-psychogeographer-cross-road.html.
2. Robert Bond and Jenny Bavidge, eds., *City Visions: The Work of Iain Sinclair* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 1.
3. Robert Macfarlane, "Iain Sinclair's struggles with the city of London," *Guardian*, 15 July 2011.

of Sinclair's output".[4] To date, the corpus consists of three comprehensive book-length studies;[5] an anthology of papers and essays;[6] two academic studies of historiography and memory in contemporary literature which analyse Sinclair's fiction;[7] a published book-length interview with Kevin Jackson;[8] and numerous papers and essays in academic journals and anthologies.

Style and strategy

Part of Sinclair's vitality and appeal to critical discourse lies in his prose style, a dense and evocative register distinguished by radical and unapologetic inter- and intratextuality, allusion, and palimpsestic techniques. Robert Sheppard describes his oeuvre as a "non-hierarchical interconnected, growing, but sometimes contradictory whole", "largely constituted by these webs of connection".[9] The other vital framework of Sinclair's mode is the interplay of space and memory, both personal and cultural. With much of his writing

4. Robert Bond, *Iain Sinclair* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2005), 2.
5. Bond, *Iain Sinclair*; Robert Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2007); Brian Baker, *Contemporary British Novelists: Iain Sinclair* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).
6. Bond, Bavidge, eds., *City Visions*.
7. Alex Murray, *Recalling London: Literature and History in the work of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair* (London: Continuum, 2007); Alan Robinson, *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory and the Contemporary Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
8. Kevin Jackson, *The Verbals: Iain Sinclair in Conversation with Kevin Jackson* (Tonbridge: Worple Press, 2003).
9. Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair*, 1.

focused on London, Sinclair's specific emphasis has been on the "reforgotten"[10] aspects of the city – those historical figures, places, and events which have been lost to popular cultural memory and replaced or erased by the homogenising logic of late capitalism. This resistance to the market economy's amnesia and cultural erasure is closely tied to Sinclair's use of psychogeographical modes of inquiry, such as long, meandering walks and explorations somewhat reminiscent of the *dérive*, with a goal of awakening forgotten connections between memory and space, and transgressing the limitations imposed by the society of the spectacle. This alignment with classical psychogeography is, however, subverted by Sinclair, both in his disdain for "aimless urban wandering",[11] and in his philosophy of occultism, shared with contemporaneous authors such as Peter Ackroyd and Stewart Home. Standing in contrast to the psychogeography of the SI, which was grounded in social philosophy, Sinclair's walks-as-remembrances are closely tied to occult forces such as ley lines, black magic rituals, and gothic tropes. In Sinclair's textual universe, "the occult logic of 'market forces'" dictates a "new geography" of homogeneity and amnesia, against which the only defence is an alternative occultism of his own making, "a raging bull journey against the energies of the

10. Sinclair neologized the term in *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London* (London: Granta Books, 1997); he has used it extensively since.
11. Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, 75.

city".[12] In *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair provides the most lucid description of his methods, the avant-garde combination of politically-resistant occultism, nostalgia, and aspects of the *dérive*:

> The notion was to cut a crude V into the sprawl of the city, to vandalise dormant energies by an act of ambulant signmaking. … These botched runes, burnt into the script in the heat of creation, offer an alternative reading – a subterranean, preconscious text capable of divination and prophecy.
>
> Walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city. … Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself. … the born-again *flâneur* is a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces, than in noticing *everything*.
>
> We had moved into the age of the stalker, journeys made with intent – sharp-eyed and unsponsored. The stalker was our role model: purposed hiking, not dawdling, nor browsing. … This was walking with a thesis. With a prey.[13]

The blend of occultism, urban "stalking" and an emphasis on remembering the reforgotten, when combined with Sinclair's unique stylistic forms and the radical heterogeneity of his intertextual connections, have positioned Sinclair

12. Iain Sinclair, Mark Pilkington and Phil Baker, "City Brain: Interview with Iain Sinclair," *Fortean Times*, April 2002, Accessed October 2014, http://www.forteantimes.com/features/interviews/37/iain_sinclair.html.
13. Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, 1, 4, 75.

as a dominant presence in the field of contemporary British writing. *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987), *Downriver* (1991), *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997), *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1997, with Dave McKean), and *Rodinsky's Room* (1999, with Rachel Lichtenstein) form the corpus of Sinclair's occult, resistant revisionings of London itself – in particular, the East End, where Sinclair had lived since the 1970s. Since the release of *Lights Out for the Territory*, however, Sinclair has begun to drift from the interior of the city; the 2002 publication of *London Orbital* saw him become one of the foundational influences on the genre of edgelands literature.[14]

With *London Orbital*, Sinclair both prefigured and foresaw the rise of popular interest in the edgelands, especially in their ability to transcend traditionally held notions of space and place. Gallent and Andersson describe the book as "something of a fringe epic", nominating Sinclair as the "champion" upon whom Shoard, in "Edgelands", calls to bring "the recognition that Emily Brontë and William Wordsworth brought to the moors and mountains and John Betjeman to the suburbs".[15] *London Orbital*, they claim, gives a broad overview of the economy, culture and aesthetics of the rural-

14. Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (London: Granta, 2002). All subsequent references are to this edition, and will be given in parentheses in the text.
15. Shoard, "Edgelands," 146.

urban fringe,[16] a view widely held in popular reviews of the book.[17] The role Sinclair played in bringing attention to a previously unnoticed space is undoubtedly significant, and later chapters will trace his impact on more recent edgeland writing. The following discussion, however, proposes that the edgelands as they are depicted in *London Orbital* are far from being a space of heterogeneous and discursive potentiality. Although the book is a polemic text driven by anger and a hatred of New Labour politics, evidenced by the discourse of the opening chapter, "Prejudices Declared", Sinclair's view actually ends up reflecting the hegemonic strategies he ostensibly resists.

Into the edgelands: tracing *London Orbital*

London Orbital is the account of Sinclair's newfound obsession with London's edgelands – before they ever bore that name – made physical fact, the narrative of a year-long journey, in stages, circumnavigating the M25 orbital motorway, which was built in the 1980s to ease traffic congestion in the city centre. Although Sinclair proposes that this "process of drift, centre to margin", was associated with the success of *Lights Out for the Territory*, and a concomitant

16. Nick Gallent and Johan Andersson, "Representing England's rural-urban fringe," *Landscape Research* 32, no. 1 (2007): 10.
17. See, for instance: Nicholas Lezard, "Meandering round the M25," *Guardian*, 21 September 2002; Will Self, "The road as metaphor of itself," *New Statesman*, 30 September 2002; Nicholas Royle, "Review of *London Orbital*," The *Independent*, 21 September 2002.

desire to explore alternative geographies,[18] a sense of anger and shame pervades *London Orbital,* lending credence to a reading of the book as a personal political work with "Prejudices Declared" from the opening lines, a manifesto against the strategies of Tony Blair and New Labour, who, in their gentrifying transformation of the East End, completed the work of the social remaking of London begun by Thatcher – and thus exiled Sinclair from his old stamping grounds, where strategies of rediscovering the reforgotten could no longer operate.

Sinclair and his travelling companions walk the almost two hundred kilometre long circuit with the occult intention of exorcising the "unthinking malignancy" of the Millennium Dome (342), figured as an "obscene fungus on Bugsby's Marshes, empty of content" (15). In the short story "The Keeper of the Rothstein Tomb", which was published in 2000, Sinclair prefigures the method of this circumambulation, and its intended consequences:

> He played the canary, fluttering around the rim of the affected area, interested to discover at what point he would go down. Norton was stone crazy, written out. If he stopped moving, so he believed, the treadmill would grind to a halt, buildings would topple … the Wall would crumble back into dust and the demons of greed, paranoia, corruption would escape.[19]

18. Jackson, *The Verbals*, 134.
19. Iain Sinclair, "The Keeper of the Rothstein Tomb," in *The Time Out Book of London Short Stories: Volume 2*, ed. Nicholas Royle (London: Penguin, 2000), 159.

Sinclair's secondary aim, in the course of *London Orbital*'s exorcism, is to locate "the point where London loses it, gives up its ghosts", and to understand the M25 in relation to the city, asking: "Was this grim necklace … the true perimeter fence? Did this conceptual ha-ha mark the boundary of whatever could be called London? Or was it a tourniquet … to choke the living breath from the metropolis?" (3).

As with much of Sinclair's writing, *London Orbital* wages its own discourse, providing, over the course of the quest, a definitive answer – the M25 is no perimeter fence, but merely a wider circle, an extension of the Dome's "bad will, mendacity", a simulacrum of a simulacrum (457). The Dome, for Sinclair, is a political act: the key image of New Labour's "phantom government, virtual policies, obfuscation" (291), a structure with no meaning, beautiful in marketing but a political and social failure in its material realisation. The M25, a key monument of Thatcherite rule, is integrated into New Labour policy, which is simply "the abiding myth of Thatcherism" reappropriated: "Best Value. Best buy. Making the best of it. Look on the bright side" (33). In its function as a reflection of the Dome, the M25, and by extension its surrounding edgeland space, are likewise "self-referential, postmodern, ironic" (443). Despite his belief that "the journey must mean something" (7), Sinclair's conclusion is disenchanted; a year later and back where he started

after his counter-clockwise ambulation, he writes of the Dome: "Here at last was the grail. Upended on a swamp in East London. Glowing in the dark" (457). With this final sentence, the malign influence of the Thatcherite-cum-New Labour politics which had slowly poisoned British cultural life continues past the end of the journey. The Dome might "consider itself exorcised" (457), but in giving the meaningless object a consciousness of its own, rather than providing a strategy of resistance to its influence on London, the quest is a failure.

The danger inherent in Sinclair's conclusion is that despite presenting himself as a counter-cultural figure, an avant-garde transgressive wanderer, he has, as Alex Murray argues, "to some extent been reincorporated by that very form of cultural appropriation that he has written about for the past 30 years".[20] In dredging up forgotten cultural memory for an ever-increasing reading public, Sinclair himself becomes "a purveyor of cultural capital"[21] – the capital being, in this instance, an over-willingness to read the projects of Thatcherite rule as political and social failures, in ignorance of the vital context of their spatial and metaphoric dimensions. As a consequence, Sinclair fails to recognise in the edgelands a space of inherent transgression and flux – something which, as shall be discussed in later chapters, other writers within the edgelands literature genre have successfully identified. As in earlier works,

20. Murray, *Recalling London*, 170.
21. Robinson, *Narrating the Past*, 167.

especially *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair counters the perceived sterility of the space with a strategy of radical re-memorialisation, the bringing back of the "reforgotten" with occult tactics that embrace the unequal power dynamics inherent in the role of author as "stalker". The prey is the orbital motorway and everything it symbolises – Thatcherite history, New Labour strategies of forgetting. The thesis is to return what has been lost to cultural memory.

The issue Sinclair faces from the early stages of his project is that the M25 and its edgelands are devoid of the specific form of memory which he is seeking: the "dormant energies" of an "alternative reading", a resistance formed via marginal and unorthodox remembrances. Sinclair desires stories, such as the quasi-mythic wanderer/madman Rodinsky of *Rodinsky's Room*, or the reimagining of Thatcher as the undead Widow and London as a dystopic ruin in *Downriver*, yet what he uncovers on the verges of the M25 is a space without prior reference. He compounds this notion by envisioning the walk around the motorway as a fugue, a psychiatric affliction characterized by amnesia:

> You didn't walk to forget, you walked to forget the walk. You carried on, often for months, years, until it was appropriate to return to your previous life. […] *Fuguer* was the right job description for our walk, our once-a-month episodes of transient mental illness. Madness as a voyage. The increasing lunacy of city life (in my case) and country life (in Renchi's)

> forced us to take to the road. The joy of these days out lay in the heightened experience of present tense actuality, the way we bypassed, for a brief space of time, the illusionism of the spin doctors, media operators and salaried liars. (120)

Despite claiming that the "present tense actuality" which he and Renchi experienced was a vehicle of joy, in contrast to the strategies of the market economy permeating both urban and rural life, the irony in Sinclair's claim lies in the fact that the spaces of the M25, for him, are yet another formulation of the "spin doctors, media operators and salaried liars" – they are Augé's non-places, objects of pure self-referentiality. A commuter-belt village is figured by Sinclair as "Amnesiaville" (400), while Victorian mental asylums are places of forgetting, where sanity can be restored in a blank location, far from the "narrative burden of the generations" (141). A number of pages are given over to describing "Siebel … a building with no function other than to carry, discreetly, the company's name" (215-18). This business development near Heathrow resists both temporality and spatiality. "It sits alongside the M25, but is not *of* the M25"; it appears, "fully formed, from nowhere. You can't date it … there is no content". Far from being a joyous place of present tense actuality, the building angers Sinclair: "If we believe in the Siebel world, we might as well give up the walk now". Nevertheless, the journey continues, until Sinclair becomes convinced that the edgelands are a non-place dead zone, an expanse

of eternal atemporality and aspatiality where "there were no memories. Nothing had happened" (141).

The stalker's manipulation of space to reveal the reforgotten having failed, Sinclair's strategy is to insert hegemonic meaning where there was none before, a methodology abetted by strategies of colonialism and invasion. Joined on his journey by an itinerant coterie of co-travellers – the artist Renchi and photographer Marc Atkins chief amongst them – Sinclair transforms into an agent of colonial power, part of a Haggardian expeditionary force involved in demarcating previously unbordered space, not with physical violence but with the use of memory as control, a creation of order in a space of flux. As Brooker argues, Sinclair's text "is in the grip of strategies which seek to order, map and *re-align* what is perceived as chaos".[22] Echoing Brooker's criticism of mapping and ordering, Sara Upstone argues that "Colonial spatial order is *not* natural. Rather, it is a conscious act, a purchase of an imaginary, on the part of the coloniser to secure power".[23] The colonial process is an *overwriting*, which captures the notion of "territory as a text" wherein "colonial treatments of space attempt to obscure an existing diversity with order. … A new reality is layered over the old, which nevertheless continues to exist as a trace, akin to the silences

22. Peter Brooker, "Iain Sinclair: the psychotic geographer treads the border-lines," in *British Fiction of the 1990s*, ed. Nick Bentley (London: Routledge, 2005), 232.
23. Sara Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 6.

of a written text".[24] In *London Orbital* the existing, diverse, and dynamic text of the edgelands is ignored by Sinclair and his companions, who instead pursue a strategy of overwriting, replacing the edgelands with a colonial fiction. This new text is colonial both in a metaphorical sense, as a tactic of control, order and demarcation, and in a quite literal one: throughout *London Orbital*, Sinclair conjures up the memory of a number of imperial narratives, weaving them into the "amnesiac circuit" of the motorway (422).

Colonising the edgelands

As Upstone argues, "the colonial project desperately relies upon open space to begin its imperialization of space", which results in "demarcation and the perpetuation of difference".[25] In the course of their circumnavigation, Sinclair and his companions evoke memories of territory and colony to fill a perceived emptiness. Pubs are outposts for colonial travellers (189); Wembley Stadium is "imperialist" (298). Sinclair's reading of the Victorian and Edwardian mental asylums is especially indicative of his attitude towards the edgelands. Defining the "green belt nothingness, the great nowhere" of the edgelands territory (4), they are colonies of the disturbed (121), likened to "Tasmania established at the rim of London" (127), taking in "all the material London didn't want – aliens,

24. Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, 6.
25. Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, 8-9.

slum bandits, ranters, poets" (288). Although he is critical of their purview to tidy away "those who gave too vivid an expression to the overwhelming melancholy of urban life" (126), he celebrates their Italianate water towers, and bemoans their redevelopment into new, Blairite "colonies of the disenchanted" (400). The water towers are figured as "orbital acupuncture needles" (224) – the analogy is made with healing and restoration; elsewhere they are "compass points, markers in a map of madness" (13) which, however, is the map walked by the *fuguer* during his "episodes of transient mental illness". Although its inmates are prisoners of London's edgeland colonies, Long Grove asylum ward, pre-regeneration, is celebrated as "a babble of arguing Hasids, displaced cabbalists, a city hive" (282). Bond reads Sinclair's attitude towards the asylums as evoking "Debate, argument, dialectic … against the developers' quasi-contract world".[26] The dialectic that emerges, nevertheless, is of colony – the empire, just as powerful, simply in exile.

Specific imperial associations are also raised in *London Orbital*: in the south-west, Renchi conflates texts, using H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* – a story of an extra-planetary force invading London suburbia and establishing a new empire – as "a guidebook". Sinclair grimly sides with Wells and the "foreign devils", acknowledging that their destructive path through Surrey was

26. Bond, *Iain Sinclair*, 185.

the only thing that could stop the "future golf courses, catteries, mediparcs and orbital motorways", of the contemporary era (251). However, near Dartford, unable to cross the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge over the Thames, he admits that "The dominating voice on this reach of the river belongs to Joseph Conrad", and wonders if they should give up the quest, "jump ship, go native" (375-6), and so be fully subsumed into the reactivated edgelands empire of non-place and supermodernity.[27]

In the penultimate section of the circumnavigation, the imperial project, a reflection of the memorialisation project, "winding the clock back" (58), is finally deemed a failure. However, victory is claimed not by the thirdspace of the edgelands, but by yet another imperial text – Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The vampiric Count is pressed into service by Sinclair to provide a variety of metaphors for the post-Thatcherite age of globalisation and neo-liberal market logic. Sinclair links blood with oil distribution, the Count anticipating "Thatcher's bluenosed sharks, Blair's public/private arrangements. Buy toxic. Buy cheap: madhouses, old chapels, decaying abbeys. Then make your play: storage and distribution" (408). In this metaphor, Sinclair views the edgelands

27. Much of Sinclair's oeuvre relates in some way to Conrad, especially the novel *Downriver* (London: Paladin, 1991), which uses *Heart of Darkness* as an allusive basis. For more on the relationship between Sinclair and Conrad, see: Robert Hampson, "Spatial Stories: Conrad and Iain Sinclair," *Conradian* 31, no. 1 (2006): 52-71; Robert Hampson, "Re-Writing Conrad," in *City Visions: The Work of Iain Sinclair*, ed. Robert Bond and Jenny Bavidge, 110-119 (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).

as a space of unanchored flows and non-places, filled with the de-memorialising machinery of the supermodern. The analogy links Dracula with a market economy: "*Dracula* announces the coming age of the estate agent. Nothing in the book works without the Count's ability to purchase, rent, secure property" (403).

Brian Baker reads Sinclair's incorporation of Dracula into his mythos as a method of returning (or transforming) non-place into place, "a palimpsest of history, narrative and power". Baker is accurate in writing that "The economic logic of vampirism is mapped onto contemporary capital", which displaces and redistributes the histories and memories of Londoners, and notes the metaphoric resonance of Sinclair describing himself as a vampire hunter.[28] However, Sinclair's attitude is contradictory: on one hand, he utilises Dracula as a critique of the Thatcher/Blair eras; on the other, he equates his own strategies with those of the Count. Dracula is named "the original psychogeographer" (404) – he is a reflection (as it were) of Sinclair and his colleagues, an imperial-era invader of London space and a rewriter of memory and narrative. Dracula's special subject, just like that of the *fuguer*, is "doctored memory, describing the past in the excited prose of a contemporary observer" (404). As Robinson argues, this is the notion of "a *present past*, that is, the

28. Baker, *Iain Sinclair*, 154.

imagined pre-existence in a previous era of what we *now* take to have been the nature of that past".[29] For Sinclair, this doctored past, despite the best attempts of the *fuguer*, has nevertheless been annihilated by the bland homogeneity of the M25:

> Like Stoker's troop of bungling adventurers, vampire hunters, we're always too late; Dracula has escaped. … The Carfax walls of 'heavy stone' have been replaced by ubiquitous chainlink fences. Another potent landscape has been exposed to daylight, stripped of its shadows. Another reservoir of memory is drained. (407)

The "potent landscape" over which Sinclair nostalgises, however, has never existed: it is a spectacle of the present past. Dracula thrives in the supermodern space of flows, and to claim that he holds access to the reservoirs of imperial memory is merely to evoke a further layering of spectacle and simulacra, a strategy Heartfield sees as "Londonnostalgia", "the imaginary reappropriation of a disparate history".[30] The weakness in Sinclair's philosophy is that his occult evocations are in danger of being revealed as colonial overwritings, strategies of control, not restoration. He himself admits: "This is how good fiction works: by transposition, a code any half-bright idiot can break. Purfleet is not (in absolute terms) where Carfax is – *but where you see it from*. The switch: subject

29. Robinson, *Narrating the Past*, 162.
30. James Heartfield, "Londonnostalgia," *Blueprint*, (September 2004), available at http://www.heartfield.org/londonostalgia.htm, accessed October 2014.

and object. You learn to empty yourself into the view" (407). In Sinclair's attempt to exorcise the structures of supermodernity, the edgelands become instead corrupted by colonial texts. Unplaced until the coloniser inserts himself into the view, these texts of control map and order thirdspace, silencing competing and resistant narratives.

Conclusions: recentering

Visiting Shepperton, J.G. Ballard's home turf, Sinclair quotes a piece the author had written in *Tate* magazine:

> They carefully avert their gaze from this nightmare terrain of dual carriageways, police cameras, science parks and executive housing, an uncentered realm bereft of civic identity, tradition or human values … And that, of course, is exactly what we like about it … our zone of possibility. (222)

The tone is not angry, but quietly ironic. While Sinclair fails to discover a living dynamicity in the edgelands, Ballard, who appears in *London Orbital* as a muse and marginal guardian of sorts, does in fact succeed, although his input is rejected by Sinclair. Sinclair describes the outer London suburb of Watford as "to carparks what Chartres was to cathedrals", echoing – or parodying – Ballard's description of the same area "the Mecca of the multi-storey carpark" (139). While Ballard enthuses over the ornate architecture and psychic

properties of these carparks – a classic location of edgelands narrative – Sinclair claims they make him "uncomfortable", evoking "anxiously cornering tyres" and "post-human fortresses", while Watford itself "wasn't worth committing to memory" (139-40). At moments like these, it is clear that the miasma of late modern amnesia has all but overtaken Sinclair, and his cynicism blinds him to what others – Ballard, as well as other authors discussed below – are willing to see.

Continuing on Ballard, Sinclair argues that "You can only achieve exilic status when you'd prefer to be somewhere else, when you acknowledge the power of the centre" (219). Ballard celebrated his "zone of possibility" against all the odds, but Sinclair, railing against the apparent emptiness of the edgelands, yearns for a centre. For Esther Leslie, he is "an exile who is alienated inside his home city".[31] Halfway through the circumambulation, Sinclair and Renchi take a break, heading to the Round Church near Fleet Street, deep inside the City of London. The effigies ringing the church are "the original circle from which all the other rings of energy drift out. Memory and meaning have a form". This is Sinclair's ideal location, "known but not overwhelmed with fake narrative", functioning as "an earthing device for the M25; a validation of the motorway as a symbol of wholeness, without end or beginning" (172). Stopping at another central church, St Bartholemew-the-Great, Sinclair writes: "This, at

31. Esther Leslie, "On Waste. Marx and the A13," paper delivered at Ad Hoc, Spatial Studies Symposium, London Metropolitan University, 4 April 2003.

last, was the paradigm, the contemplative circuit that would make our 120-mile slog tautologous" (173). The admission is plain – the *fuguer's* mind is already made up, the walk should be aborted half-way. Only within the deep heart of London could the malign influence of the Dome and the M25 be transformed into a "symbol of wholeness" (172). Bond is right in claiming that Sinclair's early work understood urban space "in terms of the entrapping logic of centralization",[32] but in *London Orbital,* the resistant strategies are abandoned and overwritten. Bond suggests that "Sinclair's actual reclamation of marginalized experience, which reveals the dialectical relation between marginalization and centralization, instead aims to *re-unite* the alienated individual with the urban totality".[33] This may be so, but the reunification of individual memory and cultural memory occurs not in the edgelands, but in the historical and spiritual centre of the urban landscape, a space subsumed with the hidden, occult articulations of anti-capitalist resistance valued by Sinclair.

Sinclair is right in claiming that space, for him, "is more than a metaphor"[34] – in the radically relational, polyphonic, and often self-contradictory textual universe he creates, space functions as a totality, an all-inclusive framework of being and knowing, upon which other metaphors can

32. Bond, *Iain Sinclair*, 173.
33. Bond, *Iain Sinclair*, 182.
34. Jackson, *The Verbals*, 76.

proliferate. However, this totality exists only within a grounding of memory, which can be dredged to the space of cognitive actuality with occult and psychogeographic tactics. As Sheppard argues, "there are too many layers of memory" in *London Orbital*,[35] too many overwritten texts, and Lee Klein is right in asserting that "we should be worried about the tendency to employ memory as the mode of discourse natural to the people without history",[36] or in the case of the edgelands, a space without history – ahistorical *because* they are chaotic and transgressive.

London Orbital is rightly considered influential on the genre of edgelands literature, but it remembers, arguably, too much of its own history within its discourse, and this ultimately works against its own admirable goal of exorcising – that is, freeing – the edgelands from a myriad of appropriations and elisions. The texts studied in the following chapter, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, and Sinclair's own *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project*, will demonstrate the recent success of a movement, within contemporary British literature, to return to the edgelands their own multiple and resistant voices.

35. Sheppard, *Iain Sinclair*, 86.
36. Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse," *Representations* 69 (2000): 144.

4. Recognition: New directions in *Edgelands* and *Ghost Milk*

> A *relingo* – an emptiness, an absence – is a sort of depository for possibilities, a place that can be seized by the imagination and inhabited by our phantom-follies. Cities need those vacant lots, those silent gaps where the mind can wander freely.
>
> Valeria Luiselli, *Sidewalks*[1]

In 2002, just one month after the publication of *London Orbital*, Marion Shoard's essay "Edgelands" was published in *Remaking the Landscape: The Changing Face of Britain*. However, for almost a decade, Shoard's appeal that the edgelands "could and should follow the suburbs from the dark pit of universal disdain into the sunlit uplands of appreciation, if not acclaim"[2] remained largely unfulfilled; the small number of academic essays which began to refocus critical attention on these previously unnoticed spaces were exclusively in the fields of human geography and land management, with no forays undertaken to bring the edgelands into literature or literary studies.[3] The eventual and long overdue

1. Valeria Luiselli, *Sidewalks*, trans. Christina McSweeney (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2014), 72.
2. Shoard, "Edgelands," 120.
3. See, for instance: Mattias Qviström and Katarina Saltzman, "Exploring landscape dynamics at the edge of the city: Spatial plans and everyday places at the inner urban fringe of Malmö, Sweden," *Sweden Landscape Research* 31, no. 1 (2006): 21-41; Mattias Qviström, "Landscapes out of order: studying the inner urban fringe beyond the rural-urban divide," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 89, no. 3 (2007): 269-82; Anna

appearance of the edgelands in popular usage was predicated by the 2011 publication of two books, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*, by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, and *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project*, by Iain Sinclair. These works gave an unprecedented vitality and currency to both the edgelands as a setting, and to the effort for their re-evaluation. Both texts use the word "edgelands" explicitly and copiously, and both – though with markedly different approaches – strive to ingrain these liminal spaces in the popular literary and cultural consciousness. This chapter will examine the discursive and theoretical modes with which Sinclair and Farley and Symmons Roberts approach the edgelands, and argue that the two works identified herald a new form of engagement with these complex and heterogeneous spaces.

The romanticism of *Edgelands*

As with Sinclair's *London Orbital*, Farley and Symmons Roberts clearly set out the goal of their work in the opening pages: "Our book is an attempt to celebrate these places, to break out of the duality of rural and urban landscape writing, to explore these unobserved parts of our shared landscape as places of

Jorgensen and Marian Tylecote, "Ambivalent landscapes – wilderness in the urban interstices," *Landscape Research* 32, no. 4 (2007): 443-62.

possibility, mystery, beauty".[4] Both Farley and Symmons Roberts are published poets; in *Edgelands*, they consciously associate themselves with the "English lyric tradition", which draws them to "the idea of praise, of celebration" as a strategy for apprehending space (6). *Edgelands* lacks a narrative; rather, is a combination of Farley and Symmons Roberts' writing, shaped as a poetic, essayesque inventory of objects to be found in the edgelands – car yards, desire paths, bridges, ponds, sewage farms, landfill sites, and so on. In the Introduction, the authors write that "we hope the chapters rhyme enough to suggest correspondences and commonalities, and that their boundaries, at least a little like the real thing, remain porous" (10). Daryl Martin furthers this argument, comparing the meditative, impressionistic mode of *Edgelands* to "a collection of poetry, where each of the individual chapters is a contained piece gathered together to address particular themes and tropes as a whole".[5]

Farley and Symmons Roberts situate their book in a Romantic lineage extending back to Wordsworth and Coleridge's 1798 collection *Lyrical Ballads*. In its sequence of poetic prose essays, *Edgelands* thus answers Shoard's call to celebrate the edgelands as Wordsworth and Emily Brontë "helped turn

4. Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), 6. All subsequent references are to this edition, and will be given in parentheses in the text.
5. Daryl Martin, "Translating Space: the Politics of Ruins, the Remote and Peripheral Places," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 3 (2014): 1111.

Britain's moors and mountains into magical landscapes of myth".[6] There are likewise resonances between the political and cultural attachments demonstrated by Farley and Symmons Roberts and the affiliations of the original Romantic poets. The celebration of English landscape effected by Wordsworth was, just as that of *Edgelands*, driven by a personal political agenda. Tim Fulford argues that Wordsworth "viewed London as an imperial storehouse, dazzling but ultimately shallow, as it uprooted people from their origins". In search of an alternative to the homogeneity and disassociation of major urban centres, Wordsworth and his fellow poets focused on the rural fringes of the Lake Country and the moors, their celebration of which "was an idealization of cultures and languages long colonized by England and English. Under way by the 1760s, it was, at its most shallow, simply a self-indulgent desire, on the part of urbanites, for a brief escape to an exotic, pastoral idyll".[7]

Farley and Symmons Roberts, in *Edgelands*, likewise feel the need to leave "the gravitational pull of London and its inner planet, the M25" (29), contrasting the "complicated, unexamined places" of the edgelands with the "flattening effects of global capitalism" (10) and the "privatised, shiny surfaces of the city" (107). The authors are, however, equally dismissive of the

6. Shoard, "Edgelands," 146.
7. Tim Fulford, "Poetry, peripheries, and empire," in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 179.

"managed, georgic" National Parks (103) – such as Wordsworth's own Lake District – and of the notion of *landscape*, which they attest "has been very much part of human culture: something that includes nature, rather than something that is wholly consistent of it" (26). They argue that these spaces have become codified, since the late 18th century, in the British consciousness, and are now part of the fully established landscape tourism industry, the simplifying narratives of which *Edgelands* aims to resist.[8]

Like their literary forbears, Farley and Symmons Roberts seek out spaces which have been given none of the homogenising, regulating attention bestowed upon other English landscapes, whether urban or rural. This literary tradition and its political motivations extend even further back than the Romantics – Malcolm Andrews, discussing the 17th century poet John Denham, notes that at the dawn of the codification of British landscape, the poet finds himself "in uncharted country … celebrating a landscape largely devoid of literary status". To defend his choice of subject, Denham offers "a *paysage moralise,* a description of a prospect in which the prominent landscape features were invested with emblematic significance … The landscape thus offered a kind of map of English political and religious history".[9] Like the 17th century

8. See also: Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989).
9. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque,* 14.

topographic poets and Romantic landscape writers, Farley and Symmons Roberts discover similarly un-evoked spaces, devoid of essentialisation or homogeneity. For the authors, these spaces become emblematic of wider concerns – indeed, the opening chapter calls upon the reader to "Take a walk through any of our edgelands and the landscape paints itself as a *paysage moralise*" (11). Farley and Symmons Roberts rail against the misrepresentation of the edgelands as "part of the urban (or suburban) landscape that has to be escaped, or transcended" (8), or – responding to "the work of some so-called *psychogeographers*" – as "merely a backdrop for bleak observations on the mess we humans have made of our lives, landscapes, politics and each other" (9). While *London Orbital* is not mentioned explicitly in *Edgelands*, these lines can be read as a critique of Sinclair's colonial overwriting: Farley and Symmons Roberts stridently oppose ignorant – hence damaging – readings of edgeland spaces, noting that "we knew this place intimately, long before we decided to write at length about it" (8).

For the authors, such long-term familiarity – along with the lack of prior attention bestowed upon these spaces – suggests that only a celebratory and evocative reading of the edgelands is a worthwhile approach. In the spirit of this open-minded engagement, *Edgelands* is a work of radically democratic aesthetics – all objects and structures in the edgelands are treated with the same

amount of curiosity and enthusiasm. Nothing is spared the poets' eager gaze: a pallet is described as "a magic carpet with rigor mortis" (197), railway embankments as glaciers carrying detritus (105), "milk-morning sun" touches edgeland weeds "in the unkempt field behind the car crushers" (257), while an Iridium flare spotter in a breaker's yard is a convert for "a new form of pagan moon worship, satellite idolatry, looking to the heavens to acknowledge the presence of our telecoms gods" (20). In a similar divine-celebratory vein, "Self-storage facilities might make good places for shrines … We could drive a couple of miles and leave our lives behind us, park up, and lock ourselves in to relax and think uncluttered thoughts in our clean and peaceful rented space" (56). In Farley and Symmons Roberts' edgelands, the structures and ruins of late capitalism are celebrated in much the same way as Wordsworth's daffodils, which appear "upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude".[10] The Romantic function of landscape remains the same, merely the space has changed.

While Farley and Symmons Roberts engage against misreadings and overwritings of edgeland spaces, *Edgelands* – unlike the avowedly political work of both the Romantic writers and their topographic predecessors such as Denham and Pope – remains essentially apolitical. In contrast with

10. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*, ed. Martin Scofield (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2003), 188.

Wordsworth, whose representation of the urban is contained in an allegorical contradiction between a rejection of the city's alienating presence, and an appreciation of its versatile and multitudinous affects,[11] *Edgelands* deals with the urban only obliquely – the city and the countryside are both identified as zones distinct from the edgelands (6), but *physical* overwritings of urban fringe areas, as by new development, are only noted passively: "In recent years edgelands woodlands have been the scene of many a protest against development … *for those who* climb in them, defend them, use them as defensible fortresses, these woods represent a bulwark against the encroachment of the urban on the rural" (168-69, italics added). Farley and Symmons Roberts' conscious *un*engagement with the political battles played out in the edgelands is emblematic of the book's general intent – to acknowledge these spaces as "a no-man's-land between the two sides, a touchstone on the constantly shifting border" (169), a temporary zone of "hiatus between the end of one industrial era and potential future development" (151), without entering into either side of the debate. In her review of *Edgelands*, Marion Shoard addresses this stance, arguing, as in her original essay, that "The edgelands now need something beyond a merely subjective celebration of their

11. Stuart Allen, "Metropolitan Wordsworth: Allegory as Affirmation and Critique in *The Prelude*," *Romanticism on the Net* 40 (2005). Accessed October 2014. http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2005/v/n40/012461ar.html.

identity. … We could be in the process of losing this landscape just as we are discovering its charms".[12]

The criticism aside, Farley and Symmons Roberts do succeed in their avowed task of presenting a purely impressionistic and meditative image of the edgelands, bringing their poetic language to bear on a wide variety of previously unrecognised spaces, thus re-placing the edgelands into the centre of popular spatial discourse. Furthermore, they avoid – to a certain extent – the overwriting of edgelands with existing narratives, such as imperial memory and the disaffecting strategies of supermodernity. *Edgelands* is thus an exemplar of a new style of edgelands literature – one which allows fringe spaces to remain liminal and unresolved, evoking rather than dismissing their potentiality. However, while Farley and Symmons Roberts avoid the use of such prior narratives, they do employ the discourse of *nostalgia*, a form of reductive and idealised memorialisation which threatens to ignore the vitality of the edgelands, transforming them into spaces of conscious amnesia, and may ultimately undermine the positive and celebratory messages of the book.

12. Marion Shoard, "*Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts – review," *Guardian*, 6 March 2011.

Discourses of nostalgia in the edgelands

Throughout *Edgelands*, Farley and Symmons Roberts extoll the power of naming and mapping. Paraphrasing the Baudrillardian conjecture that "Maps are always abstractions", Farley and Symmons Roberts note "there are always pages where the circuitry of streets gives way to blank grid squares, peppered with nameless ponds, industrial parks, nurseries and plantations" (16). The authors contrast edgeland ponds, "so unclassified that nobody thinks to give them names", with "Loved landscapes, lived-in landscapes", which "need a litany of names so we can map our stories across them" (72). In *Edgelands*, the nameless, blank zones are rendered loved and lived-in by being given a historical and memorial narrative. Far from being ahistorical or nameless, "Edgelands ruins contain a collage of time … Encountering the decay and abandonment of these places is to be made more aware than ever that we are only passing through; that there is something much bigger than us" (157). Edgelands wildlife is likewise located in an overarching narrative: "Feral means you have a history, a proper back-story. And the edgelands are the domain of the feral" (158). Edgelands locations will "sometimes find a name that will stick, and sometimes a whole history and mythology, too" (130). More often than not, however, it is the specific strategies employed by Farley and Symmons Roberts,

rather than natural patterns of human history, which construct a limiting realisation of the edgelands.

In utilising specific methodologies of historicity and mapping, which stand apart from the organic developments of memory in spaces of creative potential such as the edgelands, Farley and Symmons Roberts invite a previously absent staticity into a heterogeneous zone. The strategy the authors employ is chiefly one of nostalgic remembrance, which bell hooks defines as "that longing for something to be as it once was, a kind of useless act", and which stands in opposition to "that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present".[13] John J. Su, in an examination of current academic trends in nostalgia studies, contrasts the "intimate personal experience" of memory, which "counters institutional histories" with the "inauthentic or commodified experiences" of nostalgia,[14] while Pickering and Keightley, noting that nostalgia "is neither an absolute nor singularly universal phenomenon", do contend that in certain realisations, nostalgic strategies result "in various degrees of social amnesia", which "fails both historical knowledge and the historical imagination". [15] In *Edgelands*, Farley and Symmons Roberts

13. hooks, *Yearning,* 147.
14. John J. Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.
15. Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, "The Modalities of Nostalgia," *Current Sociology* 54 (2006): 923, 933.

manufacture an idealised, nostalgic history for the edgelands, thus seeing the space through a linear narrative rather than as a location of perpetual historical and imaginative possibility. Hence, despite the progress *Edgelands* makes in evoking the multiplicity and potential of fringe spaces, the apoliticism of the book can be read as a form of conscious memory loss, a forgetting or overlooking of the heterogeneous political processes and historical and spatial transformations which have always defined the edgelands.

In the Introduction, Farley and Symmons Roberts ask to "put aside our nostalgia for places we've never really known and see them afresh" (10), yet nostalgic remembrances are evoked continually in *Edgelands*, overwriting the fluidity of these spaces with a utopian vision of the past. In the section on ruins, Farley and Symmons Roberts attempt to find an old holiday camp: "We remember the smell … a coastal ruin redolent of old hit parades and full of the ghosts of holidaymakers from summers long past" (155). However, the ruin itself has vanished, replaced with "fresh tarmac and seeded earth verges". The new landscape is "deserted", "ominous" and "forlorn" (156). Despite railing against the heritage industry's "freeze-framing of time in order to present the visitor with a reordered, partial, tidied-up account of what happened at any particular site" (157), Farley and Symmons Roberts themselves are involved in such freeze-framing; their acknowledgment of the transitory nature of the

edgelands is predicated on the emotionally troubling loss of an idealised past. This is a refusal to acknowledge the edgelands as a space of continuous change; rather, for the authors, the edgelands *did* have an ordered and tidied-up past, which has since vanished.

Nostalgia is especially present when the authors write on edgeland spaces remembered from their own childhoods. Discussing dens, they contend that "Adults need to be especially resourceful in order to recreate the kind of spaces of solitude and apartness from the world that once seemed to come so easily" (43). Figured as a world removed from the contemporary problems of political correctness and anxiety over children's safety, the dens of the authors' childhoods are "paradise" (39). At the end of the chapter, Farley and Symmons Roberts attempt – and fail – to find modern dens, writing that "you are aware of how differently you see this world, how you can no longer get your eye in, or realise the imaginative potential in what you see" (46). The ideal past constructed by the authors has vanished, which allows its absence to infiltrate the present of the edgelands with a sense of sentimental loss. The nostalgic tenor is occasionally pitched even further back than the authors' own childhoods – remembering *Brendon Chase*, an adventure book for children, Farley and Symmons Roberts write that "this is a book about going back to nature – not just to 'the natural world', but to their own true nature, as creatures

of the wild woods. But where are the wild woods now?" (162). For a book which is avowedly about the limitless potentiality of edgelands, where both nature and industry, wood and factory can coexist in a complex interrelational discourse, *Edgelands* is not above regularly and unironically slipping into classic conceptions of a utopian Golden Age.

Despite a predominant understanding in critical discourse of nostalgia as purely negative, recent formulations of nostalgia seek to counter this theory. Examining contemporary Anglophone literature, Su argues that nostalgia "encourages an imaginative exploration of how present systems of social relations fail to address human needs, and the specific objects of nostalgia – lost or imagined homelands – represent efforts to articulate alternatives".[16] This revisionist reading of nostalgia is apposite in considerations of authors or characters facing "social dilemmas of fragmentation or displacement"[17] – narratives where the homeland is lost *because* of its disintegration in the face of modernity. Indeed, in postcolonial space, where the structures of the colonial past leave their scars on cultural and spatial consciousness, nostalgia can be a powerful narrative of restoration and creativity. Edgelands, however, are not bounded by a linear temporality, and therefore cannot be conceptualised as having been 'once whole' and 'recently fragmented'. As a fluid discourse

16. Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*, 5.
17. Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*, 3.

between many spatialities, these spaces rest outside the kind of limiting historicisation or nostalgic strategy which has, in the past, codified other British landscapes. Rather, as Doreen Massey argues of space in general, the edgelands are "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" where "the conventional continuity of landscape, and of the founding conception of space upon which it rests, is punctuated by a multiplicity of stories".[18] The nostalgic strategies used by Farley and Symmons Roberts, on the other hand, privilege a conception of a simpler, safer, and hence more coherent past over the continuous and permanent heterogeneity of the edgelands, thus denying this heterogeneity from being fully actualised. It is this politics of nostalgia – especially when coupled with the impressionistic tone of the book – which renders *Edgelands* as a text disconnected from the permanently heterogeneous reality of the space it claims to describe.

Tables turned: overwriting of the edgelands in *Ghost Milk*

Iain Sinclair's *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* was published in 2011, the same year as *Edgelands*. It heralds an abrupt change in Sinclair's spatial philosophy – and, since Sinclair's writing can be seen as the litmus test for general trends in spatiality in contemporary British fiction, as representative of

18. Doreen Massey, "Landscape/space/politics: an essay," 2011, accessed October 2014, http://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/. See also: Massey, *For Space*.

a broader revisionist approach to the edgelands. Sinclair's most recent work has not received much academic study as of yet; as a significant departure from Sinclair's previous spatial preoccupations, it is of importance to critical conceptions of both the author himself, and to contemporary conceptions of the edgelands. In *Ghost Milk*, Sinclair offers a harsh, polemical criticism of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games project in London, which was under construction when the book was being researched and written. While Sinclair's work has consistently been of a political nature, in *Ghost Milk* his anger and disgust with the Olympic project redefine and sharpen his personal politics, allowing him to articulate lucidly a new spatial philosophy. However, despite engaging far more directly with the edgelands in *Ghost Milk* than in 2002's *London Orbital*, there is nevertheless a traceable hesitancy on Sinclair's behalf to realise the full potential and fluidity of signification of edgeland spaces, even when these spaces have been destroyed – inasmuch as a space defined by transgression and transformation can be destroyed.

Unlike *Edgelands*, which is written in a meditative and impressionistic style, *Ghost Milk* is temporally structured, beginning in the early 70s with Sinclair's own memories of working as a labourer in Stratford and the Lea Valley, before moving to the late 2000s, when the Olympic Park construction in the same area was underway. Over the course of the book, Sinclair observes the

transformation of the "classic edgeland of inconvenient, dirty, fly-by-night enterprises and abortive pastoral relics",[19] closely connected to his personal history, into the eponymous "ghost milk" – a simulacrum consisting of "CGI smears on the blue fence. Real juice from a virtual host. Embalming fluid. A soup of photographic negatives. The universal element in which we sink and swim" (338). While Sinclair's definition of ghost milk is classically evasive, his attack on the London Development Agency and the Olympic project is straightforward: *Ghost Milk* condemns the mutation of edgeland space – comprised of a multiplicity of enterprises and communities, including travellers, allotment holders, petty criminals, artists, "printers, breakers' yards, food distribution" (8), and even the speculative warehousing and distribution enterprises of late capitalism where Sinclair begins his initiation into Stratford's edgelands – into "a theme park without a theme" (11), a privatised and homogenised construction "good for nothing very much, after the event" (65). The crux of the argument, as in much of Sinclair's writing, is the permanent loss of history and memory, the methodology with which "territory cannibalizes itself, until there is literally nothing there, beyond the captive shadow, the eidolon" (121). Memory having been destroyed, and lacking new content to fill the nothingness, the Olympic project is instead concerned with borders:

19. Iain Sinclair, *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* (London: Penguin, 2012), 28-29. All subsequent references are to this edition, and will be given in parentheses in the text.

"Fences replace fences" while time is made "into a grid" (48), ordering a previously fluid spatiotemporal zone.

The relationship between the ordering of spaces and a homogenisation of social processes, leading to a regressive politics, has been examined in geographically-focused studies of edgeland spaces: in a study of contemporary ruins, Edensor notes that "Processes of ordering lead to the demarcation of zones, routes and areas for specific activities, producing connected single-purposes spaces and a geography of centres, terminals, and unidirectional flows",[20] an argument expanded by Qviström, who raises the danger of apprehending disordered space as "white areas", suspended out of time until they can be filled with new developments. Historically, "such places have attracted artists, architects, geographers and ethnologists, who draw attention" not to the perceived blankness and absence of edgeland spaces, but rather to their discursive possibilities, such as "the disarraying of former orderly places, the dissolution of the boundary between city and countryside, and the development of new activities when the old order is crumbling".[21] The same argument is raised in *Ghost Milk*: in an interview Sinclair holds with Yang Lian, a Chinese/British poet affected by the construction of the Beijing Olympic

20. Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 55.
21. Qviström, "Landscapes out of order": 271.

Games project, Lian says:

> Lea Valley is being destroyed *all the time*. It is always being destroyed: by old industries, football grounds. They transform everything. The authorities have tried their best to convert the marshland, the original view, to a more commercial use. … The government and the commercial bodies don't know that vision or have that understanding. They think of Lea Valley as a place of nothing. … We, the poets, need to tell them, or at least to write down, that awareness is our poetry. I hope to suggest that Hackney does something based around the fact that there are so many writers in Lea Valley. The council should think about Lea Valley and literature. (155-6)

While Lian's contemplations may be too sentimental for Sinclair's own approach, the inclusion of the interview in *Ghost Milk* shows a collusion of thought between the two writers. The enemy for both is erasure, disappearance, homogenisation, and the blindness by the agents of capitalism towards the possibilities eternally present within the edgelands.

When Sinclair's investigative forays into the Olympic development reveal only corruption and mismanagement (43-44), a "fraudulent narrative" (99) disguised by "the smokescreen of upbeat PR, websites, viewing days, junk-mail publications and professional obfuscation" (67), he turns to alternative sources of resistant memory. After "long-established businesses closed down, travellers were expelled from edgeland settlements, and allotment holders

turned out of their gardens", the fenced-off site becomes "a symbol for opposition and the focus for discussion groups" (62). Unlike the passive and nostalgic memorialisation of *Edgelands*, the counter-discourse of memory in *Ghost Milk* is fuelled by anger and action. Responding to an interviewer querying him on the outcome of communal resistance to the London Development Agency, Sinclair replies: "'The quality of the complaints has improved. Now we have an active response in the edgelands. More anger, more subversion than I've seen in decades'" (106). Far from being a blank and static space, the edgelands, due to their unique qualities, actively generate political engagement and foster a close connection between the heterogeneity of their own present and the resistant strategies of their inhabitants – both permanent and transgressive.

This political theorisation of edgeland space has been raised in contemporary spatial philosophy. Stavros Stavrides, in his work *Towards the City of Thresholds*, discusses the specific possibilities of liminal spaces – and those undergoing a sudden change from liminality to order – as allowing disenfranchised political groupings to "express their own anger and to reclaim their own space (even better, their own distinctive spatiality: their own way of creating, understanding and inhabiting space)".[22] This conception of threshold

22. Stavros Stavrides, *Towards the City of Thresholds* (Trento: professionaldreamers, 2010), 143.

spaces as ideal locations for resistant politics is a manifestation of the thirdspace described by Soja, a zone of limitless potentiality formed by resistance to binary thinking and binary norms. Daryl Martin argues that for Stavrides, these "marginal and yet politically important spaces" continue to "operate democratically in cities otherwise characterized by post-democratic methods and systems of governance". Threshold spaces therefore underscore "the distance between politics, understood as local articulations and institutionalizations of social relations, and the political, understood as the universal principles (or lack thereof) on which a society can be founded".[23] As the politics of Sinclair's London become increasingly concerned with the capitalist hegemony, alternative political evocations, grounded in liminal spaces of potential such as edgelands, are voiced within disenfranchised communities. Rather than supporting any sort of idealised memorialisation or simulacra, the politics of the Lea Valley's population are an engagement with the edgelands in their contemporary complexity.

In opposition to these resistant politics, the *grand project* – Sinclair's term for Olympic projects since the turn of the century as a symbol of institutionalised power – is a physical perpetuation of a narrative of "legacy", a static and artificial temporality promising a spectacular future (67-68). Legacy

23. Martin, "Translating Space": 1113.

is inverse nostalgia – rather than replacing the vitality of the present with an illusory construction of an idealised past, legacy replaces it with a false promise of an illusory future, thus transforming lived space into non-place. While Sinclair claims that "you can't legislate for how humans will decide to make use of territory" (8), in *Ghost Milk*, nostalgic desires are coded deep into the Lea Valley, "where everything vanishes or is revised. And nothing returns, in the same condition, to the territory it left behind" (76). The physical overwriting of the edgelands is therefore, for Sinclair, a historical inevitability, placing him in collusion with the theory of inevitable historical return championed by his friend and rival Peter Ackroyd.[24] The Olympic project is part of a "makeover neurosis", promulgated by "political visionaries" who "couldn't leave the eastern margin of the borough alone" (10); this belief leaves open the tantalising possibility that, as Lian says, the edgelands of the Lea Valley are in a state of eternal flux and the Olympic project is merely the most recent manifestation of this process. While this possibility is hinted at, in *Ghost Milk*, the flux of space is seen as crisis, not potential, and the solution to this crisis lies not in the Lea Valley, but in a new space. Contemplating the interview with Lian, Sinclair writes:

> Water is memory. Erasure, inspiration. Without these canals, navigations,

24. Ackroyd expounds upon this theory in his *magnum opus, London: The Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000): "The biography of London also defies chronology … the fabric of the city, despite a variety of assaults, has always been preserved" (Abr. ed., London: Vintage, 2012, 2, 352).

> buried streams, the urban narrative clogs and chokes. If the Lea Valley were lost, I would walk away. There are other rivers, other stories. In which, like Yang Lian, to swim blind, to search for myself. (159)

As the narrative of the book unfolds, Sinclair indeed abandons London, heading first up the Thames to Oxford, then to Manchester and Liverpool, and finally to Berlin, with the final chapter, "American Smoke", pre-empting his 2013 book of the same name. Within all of these unfamiliar spaces, he discovers ghosts and evocations of the edgelands of his own past, which allow him to utilise the strategies of ambulatory exorcism in an attempt to heal the divide between politics and the political, and between lived space and the falsity of institutional memory. While the Millennium Dome could be exorcised at a distance, the healing in *Ghost Milk* is by necessity forced to occur within the psyche of the exorcist himself. Thus, at the Thames Estuary, Sinclair attempts to erase the rift between "consciousness and the natural world", allowing "total mind, with all its negative capacity, to wash away into a grander self" (169). The bus which takes him and his wife Anna between Liverpool and Manchester is another example of engagement with the local and the political, "the last democracy" (271) characterised by "the friendliness, the breathing space" (270). In America, Sinclair sees "Geography as morality. … Texas could dream me into existence, a floating presence lacking gravity shoes" (392). Sinclair's final

admission of the power of the edgelands is in these lines – the possibility of space writing human nature, rather than the other way round.

Conclusions

Sinclair's drift away from the Olympic development is both a surrender to the inevitable forces which cannot recognise the space of the edgelands for their intrinsic multiplicity – attempting instead to lock them into a static spectacle – and a recognition, for the first time in Sinclair's oeuvre, of the power that these spaces contain. Leaving London, he claims that "Walking where there is nothing familiar, nothing to stimulate personal memory, we are not ourselves; we must begin afresh, and that is the excitement" (131). Sinclair's loss is also a victory – in abandoning the space of his personal edgeland history, Sinclair reveals the deep connections that marginal zones forge between human lives, a fluid and hybrid historical actuality, and a localised and resistant politics. Despite the eventual failure of this ambulation – the Olympic project goes ahead as planned, while Sinclair ironically notes that by selling his archive to the Harry Ransom Centre in Texas, "I became my own grand project … for the dollars to keep me afloat for another season" (392) – his battle against the loss of memory in *Ghost Milk* reads very differently to the overwriting performed in *London Orbital*. The evocatively charged edgelands of *Ghost Milk*, in the political

engagement which they foster against homogeneity, own a psychic gravity which allows memory to be relocated, reset, and revitalised, standing in contrast with the "white hole" of the late capitalist grand projects. *Ghost Milk* is also an argument against the passivising and nostalgic approach espoused by Farley and Symmons Roberts in *Edgelands*. The heterogeneous nature of the edgelands demands an active, discursive engagement from their transgressors and inhabitants, rather than a Romantic poetics which embraces staticity and idealisation.

The following chapter will reveal that for this engagement to be fully realised – and for the edgelands to wage a discourse as a space, rather than an (albeit active and recognised) background to social and political processes – a polyphonic form of writing and a radically contemporary approach to spatiality are required. Gareth E. Rees' *Marshland: Dreams and Nightmares on the Edge of London*, the final text under discussion in this thesis, reveals the full conceptual, political and stylistic possibilities of the edgelands literature genre.

5. Polyphony: The voices of the edgelands in *Marshland*

> Chaos is at once a risk and a chance, and it is here that the possible and impossible cross each other.
>
> Jacques Derrida[1]

> In this other spatiality, different temporalities and different voices must work out means of accommodation. The chance of space must be responded to.
>
> Doreen Massey, *For Space*[2]

Marshland: Dreams and Nightmares on the Edge of London, published in 2013, is Gareth E. Rees' first book.[3] It is the product of a number of years of research and writing, some of it having been published previously on Rees' blog, *The Marshman Chronicles*,[4] and consists of a number of short narratives in various formats and modes. The book was inspired by Rees' own experiences and ambulations in the edgelands of Hackney Marsh, just north of the Olympic development which backgrounds *Ghost Milk*. As a very recent release, it has so far generated no academic attention, but as shall be argued in this chapter, it

1. Jacques Derrida et al., *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge, 1996), 84.
2. Massey, *For Space*, 111.
3. Gareth E. Rees, *Marshland: Dreams and Nightmares on the Edge of London* (London: Influx Press, 2013). All subsequent references are to this edition, and will be given in parentheses in the text.
4. Gareth E. Rees, *The Marshman Chronicles*, accessed October 2014, http://www.marshmanchronicles.com/.

represents a significant development in the discourse on the edgelands, and shall hopefully gain its share of discussion and criticism.

Within the context of this thesis, *Marshland* is positioned as the work most expressive of the perpetual spatiotemporal fluidity, evocative potentiality, heterogeneity, and resistant political engagement that form the theoretical underpinnings of the edgelands literature genre. Returning to the taxonomy of the genre developed in Chapter Two, *Marshland* is exemplary as an edgelands text, combining generic flexibility, psychogeographic modes, transgressive journeys, and an authorial presence which does not overwrite the edgelands with its own narratives, but rather works as a relational counterpoint to the marginal space: both constructed from and constructing evocations of edgeland spatiality.

Multiplicity

Edgeland spaces, as a type of thirdspace – simultaneously the centre of their own spatial configuration and the margin of multiple other spatialities – actively encourage an intertextual and multimedia narratival mode in their apprehension, as is demonstrated by Rees in *Marshland*. As Massey writes, space should be understood as that which allows "the possibility of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality … Without space, no multiplicity;

without multiplicity, no space".[5] The edgelands are definitionally resistant to simplifying and homogenising overwritings, and are therefore a space where multiplicity is not only present, but where *multiplicity is the only effective mode of engagement*. This multiplicity is, furthermore, not unidirectional: at the same time as space shapes the heterogeneous form of the text which describes it, the heterogeneous text reshapes and informs the space. Crucially, this discourse is polyphonic, with neither text nor space overwriting the other, but creating a unified text/space as the product of their discourse.

This strategy is traceable in Westphal's discussion of the "uncertain but constant oscillation between text and place", where the flows of narrative, space and society are always radically intermixed, and "all are real, imaginary, or real-and-imaginary … Narrative is now freed from the linear progression that was traditionally reserved for it; space has become recalcitrant to the classical dialectic that radically opposed the centre and the periphery".[6] In the polyphony, space itself becomes a text, so that it can be simultaneously engaged by both spatial and textual strategies; this conception is abetted by Massey's vision of space as a "simultaneity of stories-so-far", which references the temporality present in the edgelands – a temporality interconnected with spatiality, and which is therefore, just like space, "never finished; never

5. Massey, *For Space*, 9.
6. Westphal, *Geocriticism*, 163.

closed".[7] *Marshland* is exemplary of these strategies, presenting – both in terms of its structure and style, and its portrayal of the edgelands, their transgressors and inhabitants – a space of radical and discursive potentiality.

Marshland resists simple placement within standard generic and stylistic categories. In Bakhtinian terms, it is best apprehended as a *polyphonic* text, where "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" exist within one textual medium.[8] None of these voices attempts to overwhelm the other; rather, the text is generated from the discourse of voices, both with each other and their external contexts. Thus, *Marshland* is constituted of textual narratives written in modes ranging from the purely fictional to the purely realist, arranged together in such a way that it is impossible to discern where the narratives begin to diverge from reality. The line between fact and fiction is further blurred by Rees' use of inter- and intratextuality, with characters and events from different chapters, as well as other historical and fictional sources, appearing throughout the text; the author himself is fictionalised in his communications with these characters. This structural and narratival multiplicity is due in part to the origins of *Marshland*: it was developed from *The Marshman Chronicles* blog, which

7. Massey, *For Space*, 9, 47-8.
8. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6.

combines textual, visual, and audio media, and *Marshland* is likewise a multimedia work, despite its presentation as a traditional book.

Rees himself comments on his approach in constructing the work, writing that "I could have created an unofficial guide, a history or a psychogeographical travelogue. But I felt that to express the marshes in the way it mattered to me, I needed to have all of these elements in the same book, sharing the same space, informing each other".[9] The textual pieces are interspersed with illustrations by Ada Jusic, while one of the narratives is presented in the form of a graphic short story, also illustrated by Jusic (63-75); other sections of the text resemble concrete poetry (33, 238). The multimedia form is further developed in the final chapter, "A Dream Life of Hackney Marshes". This section is a libretto for a musical suite composed by the band Jetsam, with the text based on elements of *Marshland* and a short story of the same title published in the anthology *Acquired for Development By…*;[10] the suite itself is available online.[11] Following the libretto are a number of appendices: "Soundchronicity Walks" describes Rees' theory of *soundchronicity*, where listening to music at a level not loud enough to silence external sounds, while

9. Rees, "Writing a Deep Map."
10. Gareth E. Rees, "A Dream Life of Hackney Marshes," in *Acquired for Development By…*, ed. Gary Budden and Kit Caless (London: Influx Press, 2012).
11. Jetsam, *A Dream Life of Hackney Marshes*, 2013, http://jetsamsound.bandcamp.com/album/a-dream-life-of-hackney-marshes, Audio (Online).

walking through a landscape, allows "mind, music and environment" to intersect, creating a world which "exists for a moment in time, somewhere between you and the artist, mediated by the landscape" (288) – another form of radical intertextuality, collapsing the divisions between listening, seeing and reading, as well as between textual and auditory narratives. Rees offers a selection of prose pieces written as a result of his own soundchronicity walks, and a selection of recommended musical pieces for the reader to engage in soundchronicities of their own; finally, a section of commentaries on individual chapters and a multimedia bibliography reveal the heterogeneous breadth of Rees' inspirations and sources.

If one were to locate *Marshland* within a genre – apart from the genre of edgelands literature – it would be best placed in the emerging categorisation of *New Weird*, defined by a "rapid hybridisation between horror, Gothic, science fiction and the relatively new label 'dark fantasy'", exemplified by authors such as China Miéville and M. John Harrison. The hybrid form of New Weird encourages dissolutions of other boundaries, prompting a recurring motif, within these works, of "passage through strange spatial zones, weird topologies that produce anomalies, destroy category and dissolve or

reconstitute identities".[12] Linking these zones of New Weird fiction to Foucault's concept of heterotopias, Luckhurst writes:

> The Zones of the post-genre fantastic … are chaotic and disordered as a means of evading the dangers of a static utopian topology, fenced off and guarded from transgressors. They do not elaborate a separate order, but work to set up interference patterns with the dominated or policed space that surrounds them.[13]

In the spirit of New Weird – some exemplary authors of which, such as Neil Gaiman, Miéville, and Harrison, are cited in the bibliography of *Marshland* – Rees constructs not only a generically and stylistically fluid work, but sees the edgelands as a "chaotic and disordered" zone, both temporally and spatially heterogeneous. On the marshes, where the "state loses its power" and "traditional communication lines are severed", space, text and human lives meld together, which manifests itself "as an urge for the marshes' users to write themselves onto the landscape … Instead of 'Which of these things would you like?' the marshland asks, 'What would you like this place to be?'" (163). This writing of space is often evoked quite literally in the form of graffiti, created by "the invisible auteurs of the marshland" (110), who simultaneously write *in* the space, and write the space itself. "What all those who write on the marshland

12. Roger Luckhurst, "In the Zone: Topologies of Genre Weirdness," in *Gothic Science Fiction 1890-2010*, ed. Sara Wasson and Emily Alder (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2011), 22.
13. Luckhurst, "In the Zone," 27.

share is a desire not to remain a passive part of their surroundings" (114), writes Rees – the edgelands require an active, discursive engagement. The polyphony of space, person and text is joined by the omnipresent aural presence of the city, a heterogeneous "symphony of micro-melodies and rhythms" (164). Thus, "the omnipresent chugging drone of the A12 transforms the mundane into the arcane" (165), much as Rees' own soundchronicity experiments, and both the possible and the impossible, the present and the past, the natural and the constructed speak together.

The polyphonic approach of *Marshland* is addressed by Rees in an interview with *3:AM Magazine*, where he traces the evolution of the book, from an early desire to "superimpose myself, turn it into a mystical place. A mythical land. The original idea was to map it, give it all my own names", through to the realisation that "it was a different place to different people. When I discovered the other people using the marshes for escape, or inspiration or secrets … that humbled me".[14] Rees' description of the original strategy as "the gentrification approach to psychogeography" is reminiscent of the overwriting performed by Sinclair in *London Orbital* and – to a lesser extent – Farley and Symmons Roberts in *Edgeland*; while the latter authors evoke hegemonic narratives of

14. Gareth E. Rees and Simon Spanton, "edgeland: marshland," *3:AM Magazine*, March 20, 2014, accessed October 2014, http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/edgeland-marshland/.

memorialisation and nostalgia, Rees embraces the heterogeneous simultaneity of stories and voices within the edgelands.

Most strikingly, Rees' edgelands are not just an object for discursive approaches, but are themselves an agent and subject of change. The Lea River, which flows through Hackney Marshes, is figured by Rees as a character in her own right, formed from a discourse between her history, the wildlife and plantlife inhabiting her, and human interventions into her original form, such as canalisation, reservoirs, and waste disposal (31-36). Despite these tactics of control, the river is "irrepressible", and at the point where the canalised and demarcated Lee Navigation splits from the waterway, the second tributary, flowing into the heterotopic edgeland zone of the Hackney Marshes, "reconnects with a deeper chronology, before the city, before people, when monsters hunted on her banks. She remembers herself" (34). Although the Lea escapes demarcation within the Hackney Marshes, and generates a chaotic resistance to "the demands of the metropolis" (32), her resistance is polyphonic, rather than limiting – along with a reconnection to the past and the natural world, the edgeland Lea is also allied to "human devotion", such as spray-painted animals on concrete outflows, "celebrating the return to nature of prodigal water" (34). In the revitalised edgelands, hegemonic power is held back: "These animal totems have never been whitewashed by the council. They

understand that the old river can look after herself. What she wants, stays. What she doesn't, she forcibly ejects" (35). Further on, the Lea is described as "the city's amygdale" (36) – the sections of the human brain responsible for memory, decision-making, and emotional response. The agency thus afforded to the river allows her to become a vital actor within *Marshland*, coexistent in a discursive relationship between the natural, the human, and the past.

Resistant politics

The agentive nature of the edgelands is developed further in *Marshland* through the recurring appearance of the Unmoored Manor of Mutating Manifestation, a transient city-state located on a narrowboat. The UMMM is a space of limitless possibility, where the only law is "that your own will is the law", and which travels through time, over water and land, collecting transgressors in the Hackney Marshes, such as the dead narrator's widowed wife in "Life Between Epochs" and a man who is transformed into a bear in "Marsh Meat". Within the UMMM, these disenfranchised characters attain sanctuary from the social constraints and violences they have experienced, and self-determination, being encouraged to choose the narrowboat's next destination. The UMMM is a fantastical portrayal of the politics which guide *Marshland* – an "independent municipality", it is an evocation of the Hackney Marshes at their most

politically agentive, demonstrating that even after they are bounded by the expansion of London, their water siphoned and canalised into reservoirs and treatment plants, they remain a resistant force, in the imagination if not in reality.

In the penultimate chapters of *Marshland*, Rees discusses the damage done to the marshes by the Olympic Park construction, drawing out the history of resistance to demarcation and encroachment on the marshes from the eighteenth century until the present day. As Sinclair had already described in *Ghost Milk*, the protest movement, despite its active political engagement, is a failure: "A hole was torn in the shield of common law, allowing corporate money into a public space which had been denied to vested interests for centuries" (245). However, unlike Sinclair, whose reply to the gentrification of Stratford and destruction of the marshes is to abandon the edgeland space and seek psychic restoration elsewhere, Rees paints a hopeful picture of the ongoing battle:

> But this doesn't mean that the idea of open, free, common land has been vanquished. Across the water, kestrels hover, butterflies dance and swans flock over cows, horses, and wildflower meadows. People walk dogs, chop logs, smoke joints, fly kites, kiss in the bushes, photograph wildflowers, pick berries and jog through the woodland. In pubs across Clapton, Walthamstow, Leyton and Hackney Wick, marsh lovers plan their defence strategy … They are the latest defenders of the marshes, and they are not going anywhere. (245)

The edgelands are filled with the discourse of a resistant politics, which has existed since they were first threatened, and will, by nature of its grounding in a perpetually unordered space, continue indefinitely. In the next chapter, "Naja's Ark", set in a post-apocalyptic future version of the Hackney Marshes, a teenager finds a wall of edgeland graffiti recounting the marshes' history, drawings of animals and humans interwoven in polyphony with construction machinery, wartime bombs, and the UMMM; "There are words and numbers too: **Lammas, Anonymous, Occupy, 1892, Whipple, Olympiad**" (259). The multiple and resistant voices of the edgelands are perpetually alive in the textual space and spatial text of the Hackney Marshes – both in the protest movements of the present day, their historical predecessors, and the distant imagined future.

Upstone argues for the spatiality of postcolonial works to be seen as a new form of politically engaged *post-space*, which embraces chaos as "a removal of the fixed to open up new patterns of understanding and experiences".[15] *Marshland* can be readily apprehended as a postcolonial text, foregrounding a chaotic politics resistant to the colonial systems of demarcation and mapping, even – as in the case of the homogenising and amnesiac strategies of late capitalist simulacra which threaten to overwhelm the edgelands – when these

15. Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, 12.

systems are postmodern or hyperreal in nature. As Baucom argues:

> The map is a means of reclaiming origins, of mastering postmodern hysteria. In the same way that what was colonized, as an inscription on the terrain, by the Europeans in India or Africa, was Europe – the displaced center, so what is colonized in the maps of the postmodern is Europe or America's own absent culture, its lost past, history – the displaced center.[16]

The displaced centre of postmodernity is returned in *London Orbital* by strategies of colonial overwriting; in *Edgelands*, Farley and Symmons Roberts evoke what is lost in nostalgic idealisations; in *Ghost Milk*, Sinclair escapes from the contested zone, attempting to recenter his own memory even as he recognises the active politics natural to edgeland space. *Marshland,* however, stands apart from these texts, embracing chaos as a tool of change, chance, and resistance which gains strength from the heterogeneous spatiality of the edgelands, and embraces multiplicity as the true form of edgeland writing.

In such post-spaces, "oppression seemingly becomes marvellously transformed into resistance offering new radical perspectives, new sites of imagination and creativity, from which the colonial representation of territory can be excised and, perhaps, overcome".[17] At the end of "Naja's Ark", this resistance is realised fully – both by human actors and the agentive edgelands

16. Ian Baucom, "Dreams of Home: Colonialism and Postmodernism," *Research in African Literatures* 22, no. 4 (1991): 21.
17. Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, 13.

themselves – as the rivers of the world "connect with each other like re-awakening synapses until they form a single aquatic consciousness" (36), and watching the great flood, Naja says: "'All is becoming one … and when it does so, there will be no more edge, no inside, no outside, only heaven … or hell'" (268). The polyphony of the edgelands is still present even in the apocalyptic endgame, as Naja and her friend Bardu set sail across the new ocean, away from the "barricades … where all the rich folk lived … a steel wall with surveillance cameras and snipers" (227). Naja carries the powers of political resistance with her – community, polyphony, and means of transgression and mobility: "She has her raft. She has the last books in London. She has her trusted friend" (267). Slowly, hopefully, they row towards a distant horizon (268) – the eternal edge. *Marshland* is fully imbricated in this political project, which foregrounds "a concern for the very real violences and oppressions that exist within postcolonial contexts" even as its discourses tend to the imaginative, an "explicit political possibility situated in the real world".[18] Rees utilises the creative potentiality of the edgelands – in the freedom inherent in the UMMM, the agency of the River Lea, and the past and future visions of the Hackney Marsh which reveal the zone as a space of perpetual polyphony – to forge a fluid, adaptive, and politically engaged comprehension of marginal space.

18. Upstone, *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, 17.

Conclusions

As space and text become inextricably linked, it is the "simultaneity of stories-so-far", all of which are by nature resistant and polyphonic, that lie behind the chaotic power of the edgelands. In the epilogue, Rees witnesses the fictional and the real flow discursively together as he joins the ancient ritual of the Beating of the Bounds on the marshes. He sees characters from the book, while the crowd around him is "reminiscent of Ada's illustrations for my story *The Raving Dead*" (272). Standing by the river, Rees has an epiphany:

> I had undergone a metamorphosis. I was no longer a passive chronicler but an active node of marsh consciousness, carrying out its will. I had been assimilated. The landscape was dictating my behaviour, not the other way round. … How many others like me were writing about the marshes? How many more stories were there in this place? … All these marshland tales I had discovered and invented – the secret histories, local myths, and flights of imagination – they seemed like tiny drops of rain falling onto the surface of this prehistoric river which swelled with ancient memories, each water molecule a life lived. (272, 274-5)

Recognising that he is not the agent of his edgelands narrative, but that it is the edgelands themselves which speak – in their perpetual multitude of chaotic, weird, resistant and evocative voices – through the pages of *Marshland*, Rees stands above his precursors in the edgelands literature genre. In *Marshland*, the full power of the edgelands is realised. While the journey of this unique space,

from relative obscurity to a full recognition of its role in showing us the "broiling depths" of our heterogeneous society, and towards making us "feel less alienated and puzzled by the circumstances of [our] lives"[19] may have only just begun, it is the texts and authors discussed in this thesis, along with their myriad inspirations and predecessors, which demonstrate how far this space has travelled in contemporary consciousness, and how much further it can travel still.

19. Shoard, "Edgelands," 142.

Coda: Journeys beyond genre

> Sometimes I wonder if the world's so small
> That we can never get away from the sprawl
> Living in the sprawl, the dead shopping malls
> Rise like mountains beyond mountains
> And there's no end in sight,
> I need the darkness, someone please cut the lights!
>
> Arcade Fire, "Mountains Beyond Mountains"[1]

A new literary genre has emerged in last decade: coalesced out of fragmentary ideas spawned by the socio-cultural and political upheavals of the twentieth century, *edgelands literature* has gained fresh impulse and a new, cohesive identity from spatialities and modes of thinking so contemporary that modern society is still searching for appropriate names to codify them. It is precisely this that gives edgelands literature its strange and marvellous force: resistance to codification, limitation and delineation is an inherent part of its makeup, so that whatever name is given to the edgelands and their spatiotextual realisations, they will always be identifiable precisely by their *multiplicity*.

It is only natural, then, that barely had they formed a coherent identity in literature, the edgelands have already proliferated far beyond textual bounds. While this thesis has only had the space to discover their form and

1. Arcade Fire, "Mountains Beyond Mountains," on *The Suburbs* (Merge: 2010), Audio (CD).

content in some British literary works, the edgelands are everywhere, truly a space with "no more edge, no inside, no outside". British fiction has proven to be a remarkably rich and varied field in which to research edgeland realisations, yet the edgelands are of global significance, existing in their complexity and multiplicity on the borders of *any* urban area, and have most certainly begun to appear in literature written outside the UK – a study of which, sadly, this thesis has not had the space to accommodate. Similarly, abandoning their literary formulations, the edgelands have become manifest in non-textual media.

Within film, the edgelands have thus appeared in a multitude of realisations. They were explored initially by Patrick Keiller in the second and third films of the Robinson trilogy (*Robinson in Space* and *Robinson in Ruins*; Keiller's static, meditative shots of edgeland spaces gave an early form to conceptions of the edgelands, and influenced later work such as Chris Petit and Iain Sinclair's 2002 companion film to *London Orbital* by the same name. 2009 saw the release of *The London Perambulator*, which explores the journeys of deep topographer Nick Papadimitriou in interviews with other notable psychogeographic figures. Iain Sinclair has recently ventured into the edgelands again with filmmaker Andrew Kötting, sailing in a swan-shaped pedalo up the waterways of South-East England towards London, although

only Kötting makes it to the fringe zones of London proper, as Sinclair escapes to America to research the final chapters of *Ghost Milk*. The resulting film, *Swandown* (2012), is a ludic and carnivalesque portrayal of edgeland spaces on the brink of their establishment in cultural consciousness. The frequent appearance of liminal spaces in such projects suggests that – more than ever in the current moment – film remains a direct artistic link to the edgelands, which can be as creative, avant-garde, or static as the medium requires.

In *Marshland*, Rees mentions a number of musical works ideal for soundchronicity experiments, but the edgelands have already found a direct home in music: while major-label artists like Lorde (*Pure Heroine*) and Arcade Fire (*The Suburbs*) chart out visions of lives lived in the urban margins, such as Arcade Fire's "dead shopping malls" rising like "mountains beyond mountains" and Lorde's "cities you'll never see on the screen", lesser-known musicians like Karl Hyde (*Edgeland*) have written entire albums about the marginal zone. In an interview with *Pop Matters*, Hyde elaborates on his influences in writing *Edgeland*, which range from Marion Shoard's ubiquitous essay to Brian Eno's "ecology of talent idea (in which culture is re-conceived as a continually evolving sum of disparate parts, which themselves constantly evolve)".[2] Polyphonic more than ever in a musical realisation, the edgelands

2. Phil Mason, "Close to the Edgelands: An Interview with Underworld's Karl Hyde," *Pop Matters*, 8 May 2013, accessed October 2014, http://www.popmatters.com/feature/170522/karl-hyde/.

are "a state of mind belonging to someone living on those boundaries … a place where people have almost created their own language and way of life to go with their outsider status".[3]

Rees also explored – albeit briefly – the possibility of articulating edgeland narratives in the form of graphic short stories, but Laura Oldfield Ford's *Savage Messiah* zine project, running since 2005 and recently published in a collected volume,[4] is currently the apex of such work. A "samizdat counter-history of the capital during the period of neoliberal domination", *Savage Messiah* is vast in scope and radically political in content: "The perspective Ford adopts, the voices she speaks in – and which speak through her – are those of the officially defeated: the punks, squatters, ravers, football hooligans and militants left behind by a history which has ruthlessly Photoshopped them out of its finance-friendly SimCity".[5] Rejecting the tag of psychogeography, which she sees as "just middle-class men acting like colonial explorers, showing us their discoveries and guarding their plot", Ford's charting of London's post-rave edgelands in a heterogeneous work of collage, illustration, essay and memoir is the manifestation of her hope that "one might find the truth, new territories might be opened, there might be a rupturing of this collective amnesia".[6]

3. Mason, "Close to the Edgelands."
4. Laura Oldfield Ford, *Savage Messiah* (London: Verso, 2011).
5. Mark Fisher, introduction to *Savage Messiah*, v-vi.
6. Laura Oldfield Ford, qtd. in Mark Fisher, introduction to *Savage Messiah*, xiv, xvi.

Even as the edgelands proliferate in literature, where they have defined their own genre and their own unique presence, they break down the boundaries of generic definitions, appearing in many heterogeneous manifestations. As text becomes space and space text, so too can all other forms of human creativity play their role in articulating – and being articulated by – the edgelands. If Ford is right – and for my part, I hope she is – the end of the cultural amnesia of late modernity, with its insatiable impulse to codify, simplify, nostalgise, and overwrite, will come, when it does, from all directions: from literature and film, music and art; from the political and the poetic; from the spaces we are beginning to notice, the edgelands of our collective consciousness, as they perpetually articulate new ways of thinking and being in the world. While this thesis has essayed a new critical approach to the edgelands, future work can build on these discoveries and articulations. The edgelands have been *un*mapped. The time has come to discover their manifest potential – their creativity and multiplicity, their limitless possible futures.

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