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Planning Future Ruins. *Ghost Milk* by Iain Sinclair and the Olympic Waste Land

Abstract: Going against the grain of Olympic celebrations, Iain Sinclair warned against the disastrous consequences of the Grand Project in *Ghost Milk*. Instead of the promised regeneration, he could only foresee waste, contamination and the erasure of local culture, while predicting that the brand new Olympic superstructure would soon turn into ruins. Sinclair documents the legacy of a lost place, mourning the annihilation of sheds and familiar haunts. Sinclair engages with modern art, pitting Kapoor against Gormley, to demystify the Olympic epic. He maps the failure of other significant grand projects and former Olympic parks, using psychogeographic drift and the motif of the Northwest Passage, to articulate dissent.

Keywords: *decontamination, Iain Sinclair, London Olympics, Northwest Passage, psychogeography, urban wasteland*

In 2012, Danny Boyle won worldwide applause for the spectacular opening ceremony he designed for the London Olympic Games; he staged a brief history of Britain, leading from England's green and pleasant land to giant chimney stacks and industrial fires, switching to the NHS, pop culture and the Queen leaping from the sky with James Bond – a humorous blend of iconic elements showing Britain as a community, born from the past and looking to the future. But writer Iain Sinclair offered a very different version of the Olympic plot in his 2011 *Ghost Milk*: *Recent Adventures Among the Future Ruins of London on the Eve of the Olympics*, a book published on the eve of national celebration.[1] For Sinclair, far from improving or regenerating East London, the Grand Project encapsulated a trend of retro-futurism that would soon prove extremely damaging. For him, the Olympics were not to transform and glorify a lost area of London but to turn it, on the contrary, into a cultural wasteland doomed to inevitable decay. Musing on those "future ruins", he offered psychogeographic[2] drift as the only possible counter-discourse, a practice expressing dissent.

Ghost Milk is a powerful book because it transmutes genuine anger into a meditation on place and meaning. Running against the grain of pride and a sense of national unity, the mock epic title offers a pastiche of narratives of exploration and adventure stories, to pit past and present against the ghost of the future. Sinclair probes into the ruined structures he can see lurking beneath the brand new architecture (the Olympic stadium and infrastructure were still being built when the book was published). On the white cover of *Ghost Milk*, a tiny Olympic flame comes to dot the Y, while the black letters seem already

[1] Iain Sinclair, *Ghost Milk: Recent Adventures Among the Future Ruins of London on the Eve of the Olympics* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011). All further references are to this edition with the page indicated in the body of the text.

[2] Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010).

fissured, ready to collapse, commemorating what Sinclair already presented, even before the games had actually taken place, as the dilapidated fragments of a shattered area, rubble, residue, wreckage.

Official discourse claims to retrieve and restore "areas of neglect and desolation".[3] For Sinclair, the cultural historian of his own liminal area, this post-industrial borderland might actually be seen as a kind of postmodern Arcadia, with the water margins of the Lea Valley and the garden lots (to which Sinclair dedicated *Ghost Milk, "*In Memory of the Huts of the Manor Garden Allotments"). In the 2009 film Iain Sinclair made with Emily Richardson, *Memo Mori*, he lingers on the poetics of neglect pervading those small sheds "scrambled together from detritus", "wonderful accidents" growing from "random material", fitting together bits of wood and abandoned car parts, "turning windows into roofs, or doors into floors",[4] an argument which recalls Thomson's "rubbish theory"[5] and the recycling of used goods, transforming them to create new value. For Sinclair the sheds are surprisingly moving and intensely human, each a portrait of its owner. They make "a wasteland into a kind of Arcadia", soon to become a stadium and media concession. Recording the empty sheds with their roses and flowers – before they are erased to make way for the perimeter fences of the Olympics – Sinclair sees them as a human reservoir of the spirit of the place, "parodies of the country cottage, all within the most polluted strip of the city", "desert island survival structures".[6] For him, the Lea Valley has slowly created its own human eco-system, recycling past waste, whereas the Grand Plan, the future computer-enhanced spectacle of a landscape, will only re-vamp the area to condemn it to far worse decay, stripped of all intimacy. From the start of *Ghost Milk*, Sinclair warns about "myopic blunders" as the gaze is led "past the watercress beds that became the car park of Tesco superstore, to the cranes, mud mountains, and skeletal hoop of the Olympic stadium" (12). The skeleton image ties in with the elegiac dimension of *Memo Mori*. For though the contractors did promise that nothing would change, Sinclair repeatedly asks how what has vanished may return, convinced that the Olympics are to seal the disappearance of local wilderness and ritual gardening.

Mistrusting regeneration as a strategic business plan, Sinclair is above all wary of public policies of decontamination (supposedly clearing asbestos and other pollutants). Much of the anger in *Ghost Milk* engages with the actual dispersal of radioactive material, the residue from luminous watch dials that had been buried on the site of manufacture, as was attested by documented evidence. Once the contractors started to bore holes, such residue was released as a radioactive dust that spread through the water-tables, poisoning the river Lea with high levels of thorium. The "big vision" of political elites is debunked in *Ghost Milk* as short-sighted propaganda.

[3] The expression is taken from an early protest against development, long before the Olympics; Iain Sinclair, "A Hit of Rus in Urbe", *The London Review of Books* (27 June 2002), http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n12/iain-sinclair/a-hit-of-rus-in-urbe, accessed 9 March 2015.

[4] Emily Richardson and Iain Sinclair, *Memo Mori*, 2009: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuClVcl3GXg, accessed 9 March 2015.

[5] Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1979).

[6] Memo Mori. Emily Richardson & Iain Sinclair.

For the Games are a flickering mirage that will last but a summer. Even more than *London Orbital* and Sinclair's circumnavigation of the M25, *Ghost Milk* is a deliberately anachronistic book of dissent (or to use Rancière's concept, *dissensus*), rebelling against the enforced "partition of the perceptible",[7] where the greatest good for the greatest number overrules the opposition of the local people. The book unravels what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence",[8] exemplified by the blue fence locking up the area, erected against terrorism and forbidding access to once familiar places, an instance of customized paranoia for Sinclair, since the terrorist threat is bred by the prospect of the Games. For the writer is concerned with the local community, rather than the spurious national unity begotten by the Games. He knows that his words cannot prevail, that local opposition cannot win against the media (hence his weariness when confronting time and again Tessa Jowell[9] on TV). *Ghost Milk* returns to psychogeography, walking and writing as a means of protest. The book plays on key images, such as the anti-pastoral spectral milk (the juice of virtual logic or "embalming fluid" [338]) and the Northwest Passage, which Sinclair displaces with ironic zest.

[7] See Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics,* trans. by Stephen Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010) and *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

[9] Tessa Jowell, a Labour MP, was a member of the Blair and Brown Cabinets, and Minister for the Olympics until 2010 and then Shadow Minister for the Olympics and Shadow Minister for London until September 2012.

The image of the Northwest Passage has long been associated with psychogeography, as an extract from "Open up the Northwest Passage", a text published by the *London Psychogeographical Association* in 1993[10] (which quotes the 1963 Situationist International declaration) shows:

> It is a matter of finding, of opening up, the 'Northwest Passage' towards a new revolution that cannot tolerate masses of performers, a revolution that must surge over the central terrain which until now has been sheltered from revolutionary upheavals: the conquest of everyday life.[11]

[10] The *London Psychogeographical Association* was reborn in the 1990s, and Sinclair actively participated in the beginning.

[11] Stewart Home, *Mind Invaders* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997), 13.

Drift aims to bridge social gaps, to create a form of counter-culture, "an anti-Euclidean opposition that will rekindle the fires of revolt with the matchsticks of metaphor".[12] The manifesto revisits the historical quest for the fabled Northwest Passage, which in the early 19th century was supposed to offer a shortcut to China and trade across the Arctic.

[12] Ibid, 136.

The image also harks back to De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater* (a tutelary figure acknowledged by both Guy Debord – the French theoretician of psychogeography – and Sinclair):

> and seeking ambitiously searching for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and head-lands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphynx's riddles of streets without thoroughfares ... I could almost have believed at times, that I must be the discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted, whether they had been laid on the modern charts of London.[13]

[13] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an Opium-Eater* (Oxford: Oxford U. P.,1998 [1821]), 47-48.

De Quincey was thus the first master of drift, walking in "a blur of perpetual motion", "[plotting] escape", "the unstable model for everything I was trying to write" (276). *Ghost Milk* is placed under the sign of De Quincey and his key mythical metaphor: "I wanted to test my faith in the northwest passage, as a metaphor and as a practical solution" (203).

Iain Sinclair first takes the motif at face value, before switching to psychogeographic drift. Indeed, he devotes a chapter (aptly entitled "Northwest Passage") to the geographic quest, and sums up the long series of journeys of discoveries, from the Elizabethan Frobisher to the thirst for expansion that followed the Napoleonic wars, and John Franklin's attempts (from 1822 to his final disastrous voyage begun in 1845):

> It was a high-risk enterprise, this squeezing through ice floes, over the top of the world, between the Atlantic and Pacific, searching for "Arctic Grail". Englishmen, from Sir Martin Frobisher in 1576 to John Franklin in 1845, ventured in unchartered oceans. (203-204)

Sinclair ironically transposes the passage from the Arctic to the mud of London borderland, leading from one of the London Stones (that once signalled the limits of the city and the estuary of the Thames) to the stone laid to recall Frobisher's departure for the Northwest Passage in Elizabethan times. For Sinclair, as Heike Hartung has shown, all walk is a palimpsest.[14] Here Sinclair follows the footsteps of those who once walked "against the grain" (as the title of the chapter has it), from Hogarth to J.G. Ballard. He is also discarding the maps that might put a stop to drift, such as the *Ordnance Survey map* or the book he takes as his guidebook, not the Baedeker but, ironically enough, Peter Ackroyd's 2007 book, *Thames, Sacred River*.[15] For Ackroyd, the Thames's flow must be followed, one cannot begin at the mouth of the estuary, lest one should run against the course of History. For Sinclair on the other hand, one must walk back towards London: his "reverse Ackroyd walk" (183) seeks to dismiss consensual nostalgia.[16] Thus he takes the London Stone which signals the merging of the Thames and the North Sea as his starting point, a symbolic landmark of the quest for the Northwest Passage. Once again, a literary echo may be heard – this is indeed the "sea-reach of the Thames" chosen by Conrad at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness,* "one of the dark places of the earth", where Marlow begins his tale by mentioning the "great knights-errant of the sea"[17] including Franklin and his ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror.* As opposed to Ackroyd's celebration, Sinclair's walk turns into a kind of reverse journey towards the heart of darkness. Ackroyd's "deceptive" map promised the song of the Thames, the seashore with shells, blank "pure white space", but Sinclair can

[14] Heike Hartung, "Walking and Writing the City: Visions of London in the Works of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair", in Susan Onega and John A. Stotesbury, eds., *London in Literature: Visionary Mappings of the Metropolis* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002), 141-163. For Brian Baker, "What Sinclair attempts to do is not to consume the spectacle of urban space, but to produce it through a reinscription of its histories. Baker also insists on the spectral dimension of his haunts. Brian Baker, *Iain Sinclair* (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 2007), 21.

[15] Peter Ackroyd, *Thames, Sacred River* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007). Logically enough, the Baedeker is mentioned in the chapter but only to recall that the German version published in 1936 for the Olympics was bowdlerized to cut out all reference to bridges and railways.

[16] Both writers read London as a palimpsest. "What results is the defamiliarization of London as narrative" Phillips, Lawrence, *London Narratives: Post-War Fictions and the City* (London: Continuum, 2006), 135. They write, however, from different perspectives.

[17] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1995 [1899]), 49.

only find a forbidden military zone with concrete blocks cutting off the path. This obstacle is included in the book through both photograph and description: "A pebble shore protected by sharp-angled Vorticist obstructions" (180). This entails meandering ways which turn the journey to the stone into a trial (Sinclair is tempted to give up), in this parodic quest for a diminutive Northwest Passage. Circumnavigating interdiction is required, and Sinclair must return with photographer Stephen Gill, to venture into the forbidden area aboard a small kayak. The wind, the choppy water recall narratives of exploration, Franklin's first journey by land, for instance. When they finally reach the obelisk, inlaid with fossils and half-erased names, we might well expect a photograph, but the picture shows instead Stephen Gill frozen in mid-air, arms spread, eyes towards the water, as if "jumping from insecure foothold to foothold, to arrive on a sandy beach of Crusoe novelty" (185). The pastiche of exploration ends with the misty photograph of a distant chimney, with muddy holes in the foreground, and "solitary trees poking out of rubble islands" (187). Thus the chapter is indeed written "against the grain", a pun on the name of the Grain Power Station, another vain ecological battle ("the battle of Grain" (182) – at least at the time when the book was published, the plant having been dismantled in 2015) – not to mention the threat of the Isle of Grain airport (one of the possible locations considered for a new airport). Thus the London Stone marks a waste land that recalls T.S. Eliot's, signalling simply the "madness of the Thames Gateway colonization" (183). Another landmark appears at the very end of the chapter on the edge of the forbidden military zone, an iron hut on which the grey letters "OLYMPIC" are scribbled, like a lookout or a prison.

The epic tale of the glorious Olympic Games is thus replaced by an absurd journey to the edge. The next step is Frobisher's stone (now watching over one of the ventilation shafts of the tunnel of Rotherhithe) which Sinclair seeks with film director Chris Petit, pursuing the Passage motif:

> I take a snapshot of Petit alongside a sign that says: GREENLAND PASSAGE. Hoar-stubbled, eyes narrowed, he's ready to climb the gangplank for a doomed Arctic Grail expedition.
> Unfortunately, the ferry isn't operating and the pier is padlocked. To get at our northwest passage we have to cross the river. (211)

With humour the text substitutes a ferry for the *Erebus* or the *Terror*, and a river for the arctic icy expanse. But Frobisher's stone is a significant goal. Indeed, to convince Queen Elizabeth I to finance further expeditions, Frobisher brought back samples of fool's gold, and set off again with a tremendous fleet of fifteen ships. He brought back tons and tons of ore containing only iron pyrite. As Glyn Williams recalls in *Arctic Labyrinth*, furnaces were also built at Dartford during his journey, to extract the promised gold:

> In all, 1250 tons of ore reached the huddle of blast furnaces, watermills and workshops built at Dartford ... The poorly constructed if expensive furnaces at Dartford were abandoned within twelve months of their building, while over the years the great piles of low-grade ore gained at such expense and hardship were used to repair roads and build walls in the Datford area. Some of it can still be seen today, glistening when the sun catches it.[18]

[18] Glyn Williams, *Arctic Labyrinth* (London: Penguin, 2009), 29.

For Sinclair, Olympic gold is a mirage, the modern avatar of Frobisher's mad quest and Dartford's ruined furnaces. No wonder that the short film directed by Mike Wells in 2011, featuring extracts from *Ghost Milk* read by Sinclair (accompanied by the sad saxophone of jazz player Bill Parry-Davies), should be entitled "Gold Dust".[19] A hyperreal computer-generated fantasy, the stadium is a gold rush which will beget nothing but rubbish.

[19] Mike Wells, *Gold Dust* (2011), http://vimeo.com/28065136, accessed 22 September 2014.

As if modelled on narrative of explorations, constrained by the erratic leads in the ice which open and close, constantly forcing explorers to change course, *Ghost Milk* steers its erratic course by jumping back and forth, stumbling upon obstacles and beginning again, elsewhere in terms of time and space. Wandering along the blue fence (that is covered with graffiti and blocks access to the future Olympic Park) is interspersed with flashbacks (Sinclair in his youth working in Hackney, unloading trucks), or detours to Liverpool, Hull or Manchester. There is, however, a loose but symptomatic connection. Sinclair is fascinated by "Urbis", another Grand Project designed in Manchester by Ian Simpson in 2002 (following the 1996 IRA bombing) – a Museum which failed, and was subsequently devoted to football, a blueprint of the Olympic Stadium and its future failure. As part of the Passage motif, Sinclair positions Urbis as a glacier or an iceberg stranded in the midst of Manchester: "And Urbis was part of the fallout, the collateral damage, a museum of the city dedicated to cultural amnesia" (288). From Liverpool to Hull, Sinclair's erratic progress thus leads from one sea to the next, a Northeast rather than a Northwest Passage. But there are other detours, to Berlin and the ghost of the spectacular display orchestrated by Hitler and filmed by Leni Riefenstahl en 1936, tainting the games with fascism. Even more symptomatic of the Olympic sham or scam is the shift to Greece, where the relics of the Parthenon and amphitheatres are juxtaposed with the mad splendour of the Olympic stadium. The disaffected modern remains stand in the shattered country like an oracle of hubris, "De Quincey nightmares that fade in the cold Athenian dawn" (375).

Calling time on the Olympic project, Sinclair then retrieves the metaphor of the Northwest Passage in its psychogeographic sense, as the very opposite of the colonial venture.

Dismissing fool's gold, Sinclair adopts walking as a line of flight. He offers drift as a way of revisiting the quotidian, to find stunning singularity and oppose the logic of official improvement.

Cassandra-like, Sinclair cannot expect his prophecy to be heeded: his brief allusion to miners' birds may be read in the light of Georges Didi-Huberman's 2014 essay, *Sentir le grisou,* which deals with historical foresight and the ability to sense forthcoming catastrophe: "quels seraient les organes sensoriels d'un tel voir-venir, d'un tel regard-temps?".[20] For Sinclair, drifting and walking may rekindle sight and the ability to read places and impending events. Franklin's error becomes the implicit model for capitalistic blindness (hence the metaphorical "permafrost of conspicuous investment" [58]). Like the mad Elizabethan venture, Victorian failure is a case in point: "The Franklin expedition, like a missing chapter from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* solicited catastrophe. Rumours of cannibalism. Fatty human traces in blackened kettles. Frozen air clamping hard on human vanity" (204).

[20] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Sentir le grisou* (Paris: Minuit, 2014), 9.

In the case of Franklin, brand new technology (steam engines, tinned food that was supposed to last for years) was meant to prevent disaster; yet the 1845 expedition vanished almost without a trace. The mystery led to countless search expeditions. In the 1980's Owen Beattie excavated the only bodies ever found (they had been buried early on, on Beechey Island), and found significant levels of lead poisoning, suggesting that the badly-soldered cans had killed rather than preserved lives.[21] In Sinclair's beloved London too, technology moves swiftly, neighbourhoods are destroyed, tadpoles relocated, garden plots erased. This is indeed a case of deliberate colonization, as Phil Cohen suggests in *On the Wrong Side of the Track? East London and the Post Olympics.*[22] In a chapter entitled "London Goes East", Cohen claims that the City reads East London in terms of Gothic Orientalism, turning *Eastenders* into the Other, the Empire's refuse calling for civilization and renovation. Sinclair fights again the legacy of Thatcher, the refusal to let the locals control a space which may have seemed dilapidated, but which they considered as their own: building the new infrastructure is nothing less than "a process of internal colonization as a new commercial empire", "to force a shortcut to more exploitable territory" (172).

[21] Owen Beattie and John Geiger, *Frozen in Time* (Vancouver: Douglas & Mc Intyre, 2004 [1987]).

[22] Phil Cohen, *On the Wrong Side of the Track? East London and the Post Olympics* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2013)

The lead that poisoned the bodies of Franklin sailors finds its modern equivalent in the "ghost milk" oozing from the wounded land: "Toxic blight was all around, the ghost milk dying industries" (34). The wasteland has been poisoned, as the water of the Lea has become a threat, contaminated by thorium.

Toxic waste is matched by the poison of propaganda: "Ghost-mouths eating the rubble of development, the melancholy soup of black propaganda". (75) For Sinclair, the nationwide hysterical attachment to the Olympics taps into hegemonic dreams of bygone Empire and economic regeneration. For the Grand Project appeals not so much because of sports as because of the promised

legacy jump-starting London's economy, turning the Olympic Park into the navel of a new nation. In an interview Sinclair sees the forthcoming Olympics as a kind of collective hallucination, which we might call Fata Morgana, a mirage hovering on the ice. In *Ghost Milk,* teleological fantasy is ironically undermined by the repetition of clichés: "the manufacture of new clichés. *Direction of travel.* Whatever the mire, whatever revelations of malpractice and incompetence, you trot out this phrase: direction of travel." Yet this misguided leap forward fails to take into account potential misdirection, implicitly recalling Franklin's mistake as he sailed along the wrong side of King William Island, and was trapped in the ice that was never to melt: "Count the cost. Heap up the dead. Bury that in the direction of travel" (47).

For Sinclair, the upbeat Olympic promise is a sham, or, as we might say, a degraded utopia, to recall Louis Marin's deconstruction of Disneyland:[23] "The long march towards a theme park without a theme" (12). Indeed, there is a Disney touch in Danny Boyle's march from England's green and pleasant land (complete with tiny fake clouds and sheep) to the giant chimneys of furnaces and the melting fire filling the Olympic rings, a stunning visual moment tapping into the film adaptations of Tolkien and the idea of a community nourished by the fellowship of the ring. The reader might expect the inevitable melting of ice-caps, but Sinclair barely mentions it. Instead, the text plays on metaphorical transposition to convey Sinclair's deep attachment to the culture of Hackney and the walks lost to the Olympic Park.

[23] Louis Marin, *Utopiques: jeux d'espace* (Paris: Minuit, 1973).

For throughout the text China recurs as a motif implicitly recalling the commercial goals of the quest for the Northwest Passage, from a Chinese restaurant to the Chinese goods carried by the young Sinclair, accepting any odd job: "China is the myth, the money opera" (55). Gradually, the motif is connected to the Olympics, via a Chinese poet exiled in Hackney, Yang Lian: "I don't try to compare the Olympic experience in Beijing directly with what is happening in Lea Valley ... I witnessed the destruction of history in Beijing ... Lea Valley is being destroyed all the time ... I deeply hope the London Olympics are not only for commercial gain, but for the discovery of this other spirit. The invisible link between this land and mine" (157). Ironically, the Olympics superimpose China and England, achieving the phantasmatic Northwest Passage, since both governments (*mutatis mutandis*) yield to the nationalistic mirage, regardless of the people living in the area refurbished for the games.

Hence the significant stop in Liverpool. As Tessa Jowell proudly claimed, no one will die while building the Olympics apparatus, yet the text remains haunted. There are many tale-telling allusions to an "incident" before Sinclair actually visits Crosby Beach, where a group of Chinese migrants were trapped by the tide while picking cockles for local restaurants. Sinclair pauses on the

statues placed by Gormley by the Mersey's mouth, placed like an implicit commemoration. Endlessly duplicating Gormley's own body, those statues gnawed by sand and shells, left to rust also bear testimony to the passing of time. Hovering between light, sand and sea, the statue slowly sink, swallowed by Beckettian paralysis: "the pieces appear and disappear", as Gormley puts it.[24] For Christine Reynier the permanent display raises the romantic question of presence and absence, of Benjamin's notion of aura in times of mechanical reproduction, while recalling residue and the Industrial remains of Liverpool: "Thus Gormley's mechanical art of uniformity retrieves, through the agency of nature, a form of singularity".[25] Facing North, the statues play on the energy of space and of the human body, prompting a more open gaze.

Inhabiting space and looking out endlessly towards the sea, the statues may stand both for the Chinese workers who could not speak English, and for the sailors of Franklin's last expedition, trapped in the arctic.[26] Sinclair quotes John Davies to describe the statues. Rather than a photograph of Gormley's work, he inserts the picture of a single man walking on the sand, an ironic counterpart of the Olympic fuss and feats. Walking on the liminal beach defies the economy of the competitive, colonial or capitalistic venture.

To conclude, *Ghost Milk* revisits marginal places to challenge the redesigning of East London for the Olympics. Using the ironic motif of the Northwest Passage, Sinclair muses on the passing of time and contrasts forms of neglect, opposing ways of inhabiting the land. Watching over the brand new Olympic Park, the huge statue by Anish Kapoor (the UK's tallest statue, bigger than Gormley's "Angel of the North", as Sinclair stresses), strangely called "Arcelor Mittal Orbit", offers the ultimate expensive landmark of England's artificial Olympic Green Land:

> What a bizarre focal point Anish Kapoor's spiral callipers are: a Laocoönian observation platform strangled in red steel at a cost of many millions, while electricity pylons, with their austere elegance, once hymned by the poets of the 1930s, have been removed, at enormous cost, from the same site to be buried in the radioactive filth of landfill dumps and industrial detritus.[27]

As opposed to this landmark of a future waste land, Gormley's statues by the edge of the sea call for a different kind of space. Ghosting the Northwest Passage, as it were, Sinclair chronicles a helpless fight, calling for an ethics of vulnerability, reclaiming and inhabiting the margins: "How can something return when it has been obliterated?" (74). The last elegiac gesture, after the anger and elegiac energy of *Ghost Milk,* is the defiance of the clown: mocking the Olympic torch procession, Sinclair and Andrew Kötting[28] opted for a mock Odyssey aboard a fibreglass pedalo in the shape of a swan, filming the transition from the bucolic landscape of Sussex and Kent to the polluted Lea

[24] Antony Gormley, "Sculpted Space, within and without", recorded conference, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJ66jv8ICjc, accessed 22 September 2014.

[25] "Relocating Autonomy and Commitment: Anthony Gormley's 'Another Place'", in Jean-Michel Ganteau and Christine Reynier, eds., *Autonomy and Commitment in 19th- to 21st-Century British Arts* (Montpellier: PULM, 2012), 258.

[26] For Christine Reynier, the statues mock the explorers' statues traditionally erected in harbours, facing the sea.

[27] Iain Sinclair, "Diary", *The London Review of Books,* 34.16 (30 August 2012), 38-9.

[28] Andrew Kötting, *Swandown*, 2013.

and the formidable Olympic site, a last sign or fitting swan song for the haphazard *Ghost Milk*, and the long fight against the logic of consumption and waste.