Chapter Five

The Communality of the Underdeck: Dirty-Pretty Surrealism

> the communality of the underdeck was powerful. Post-terror families clung to their small span of allotted territory. (*DOS*: 53)

> One can imagine that if Louis Aragon had come to England and someone had taken him to Blackpool, he might have been intrigued, and England wouldn't have been left off the Surrealist map of the world. (Patrick Keiller, 1999: 230)

In 2002 the filmmaker Stephen Frears released *Dirty Pretty Things*, a thriller which follows the lives of a group of 'illegal' or irregular immigrants working at the fictional 'Baltic Hotel' in West London. In the rooms and corridors of this establishment a number of clandestine economies thrive: cash-in-hand labour, prostitution, and, rather more implausibly, a flourishing trade in human organs removed to supply black-market transplants. Frears' stated intention was for *Dirty Pretty Things* to be a film about 'The people you see out of the corner of your eye but don't really dwell upon' (in Shoard, 2002), and indeed the film very consciously reminds us of these intentions throughout. The lead protagonist, Okwe—a Nigerian doctor turned minicab driver and night-porter, is given an expository speech at the film's conclusion, in which the 'message' of the movie is hammered home. 'We are the people you do not see', he tells us. We are the ones who clean your rooms. We drive your cabs. And suck your cocks' (Frears, 2002).

Frears, who would have a major success in 2006 with *The Queen*, a depiction of the 1997 furore surrounding the death of Princess Diana, presented in *Dirty Pretty Things* what he himself calls a 'vulgar' (in Shoard, 2002: 1) film with a social agenda: to bring into visibility a disavowed immigrant underclass whose extra-legal existence on the fringes (but also, of course, at the centre) of society renders them not only highly vulnerable but also 'invisible'. Reviews of *Dirty Pretty Things* almost uniformly saluted this aspect of the film, drawing upon on often remarkably similar vocabulary to praise *Dirty Pretty Things*' attempt to 'uncover': 'The city's secret

heartbeat' (Sandu, 2002: 1) and 'the heart of London's Underground' (French, 2002: 1).

Not all reviewers were impressed, however. To quote a sceptical *Sight and Sound* leader: '*Dirty Pretty Things* explores the invisible heart of the city. Iain Sinclair isn't convinced' (Sinclair, 2002: 32). It makes sense that Sinclair, in his on-off role as journalist and cultural commenter, would be called upon to review *Dirty Pretty Things*. The 'invisible heart of the city' is, of course, precisely the territory with which the psychogeographer has come to be associated, and is seen, increasingly, as *his* territory. Finding little to praise in Frears' film, Sinclair dismissed *Dirty Pretty Things* in this review as: 'Tabloid sentimentality. English gothic sprayed with duty-free Euro perfume' (Sinclair, 2002: 33). More specifically, and importantly, Sinclair took issue here with the film's pivotal contention that economic migrants of the kind working at the Baltic Hotel are 'the people that you do not see'. On the contrary, he argues: 'asylum seekers, the lost souls of London, are all too visible' (Sinclair, 2002: 32).

This chapter suggests that a great deal rests on Sinclair's claims to be able to *see* 'asylum seekers'. Situating this claim in relation to a broader cultural and political context in which the visibility/invisibility of the discursively constructed figure of the immigrant has come increasingly to stand as radical alterity against whose presence/absence boundaries of *community* are formed and tested, I will return, as Sinclair himself does, to his attack on Stephen Frears and *Dirty Pretty Things,* in relation to his 2004 novel *Dining on Stones*. Set partly in St. Leonards-on-sea, Hastings, where Sinclair has kept a second home since 2003, the topographies of this in 'a dull town on the edge of Europe' (*DOS*: 50) infuse *Dining on Stones*, and introduce an important new frontier in Sinclair's creative practice. Les Back has argued that in the UK in the early years of the new millennium:

> it is the small provincial towns on the [British] coast like Margate, Dover and Hastings that have become the centre of concern about illegal immigration and asylum. These towns which occupy a special location in the national imaginary [...] have become the new frontier for the defenders of exclusive national culture and 'rights for whites'. (Back, 2003: 342).

Seaside towns do indeed occupy a 'special place in the national imaginary', and in entering this new imaginative territory in the late stages of his career Sinclair too is compelled to confront these cultural reverberations, and to find his own place in a landscape weighted with nostalgic, sentimental, and indeed nationalistic

associations. This chapter explores ways through which Sinclair's move to the coast might bring him into contact with what he refers to in that book as a 'communality of the underdeck' (*DOS*: 53) shared by the 'asylum seekers and economic immigrants' (*DOS*: 52) dwelling in the rundown hotels and boarding houses of St. Leonards. Refocussing his documentary project through the new lenses offered by his seaside retreat, it is here, I suggest, that Sinclair ultimately finds a 'Surreal' perspective through which to *see* the 'asylum seeker' in ways which destabilise more destructive cultural narratives of association and 'recognition'.

Murderous Associations: Figuring the 'Asylum Seeker'

Looking back, in his autobiography *A Journey*, at the 2005 general election campaign fought against the Conservatives under Michael Howard, Tony Blair remembers that, '[t]he Tories had one good issue to beat us with: immigration' (Blair, 2010: 523). Blair was at that time, as he freely admits, 'worried about immigration' (491). Indeed 'worried' is putting it lightly. Anthony Selden suggests that in 2004, 'asylum' replaced law and order 'at the top of [Blair's] domestic agenda' (Selden, 2005: 635), and that accordingly the Prime Minster 'demanded asylum figures be sent to him each week, and declared he wanted to have the numbers cut by 50 per cent' (635). Throughout New Labour's second term, the foreign policy adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan and the memory of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (followed by the Madrid train bombings of March 2004, and, shortly after the election, suicide attacks on the London transport system on 7th July 2005) fuelled an atmosphere of potentially rampant Islamophobia and a non-specific fear of 'extremism'. Hence issues of 'asylum' and immigration were pushed to the very top of the political agenda, with Blair himself taking a hawk-like interest in the numbers of people applying for refugee status in the U.K.

The fact that Blair wanted these applications cut, quite arbitrarily, by half, reflects just how hot an issue 'asylum seekers' had become in the run up to the 2005 election. Writing close to that election, Doreen Massey, for example, noted the prominence of 'dismally negative debates about immigration and asylum' (Massey, 2007: 5) in the popular discourses of the time, and indeed an increasingly vast body of scholarly work has suggested that Britain was over this period experiencing a virulent media-fuelled 'moral panic' (Grillo, 2005: 235) over the supposed influxes of 'asylum seekers' and 'illegal' immigrants (the two categories often being used interchangeably) arriving on its shores. *Media Image, Community Impact*, a report

produced in 2004 by the Information Centre About Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR), commissioned by the London Mayoral Office, demonstrates something of the sheer intensity of this.

Monitoring the reporting of issues of 'asylum' in the UK media between August and October 2003, the report notes that some newspapers, 'ran stories on asylum up to six days a week in the seven week sample period, sometimes with several articles in one day' (ICAR, 2004: 20). 'Asylum seekers', clearly, were big news—occupying a prominent place in the popular imaginary. The ICAR report concludes, too, that the 'overwhelmingly hostile' (39) language found in its sample—which included the frequent use of words such as: '"Scrounger, sponger, fraudster, [...] arrested, jailed, guilty, "mob, hoarder, riot, rampage, disorder"' (35)—was *likely to give rise to feelings of fear and hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees among their readers*' (41, original emphasis). In a media climate in which a 'flood' of 'asylum seekers threatened, according to the *Sun*, to overspill and pollute 'our' national boundaries, eroding the very fabric of what constitutes 'us' as a society, this seems like something of an understatement.[1]

The basic sentiments expressed here were not limited to the *Sun*, however. Indeed they were echoed—albeit in seemingly more 'reasonable' forms—across the political spectrum, as the following passage from Blair's *A Journey* suggests:

> The truth is that immigration, unless properly controlled, can cause genuine tensions, put a strain on limited resources and provide a sense in the areas into which migrants come in large numbers that the community has lost control of its own future. What's more, there were certain categories of immigrant flow, from certain often highly troubled parts of the world, who imported their own internal issues [...] into the towns and villages of Britain. Unsurprisingly, this caused real anxiety. (Blair, 2010: 524)

Immigration, Blair argued matter-of-factly, is a threat to *community*: particularly when conceived in relation to the fondly imagined communities found in Britain's 'towns and villages'. It is noticeable that Blair neglects to mention *cities* in this passage, and indeed what is conjured instead is a vision of the 'Middle England' heartland of New Labour's communitarian fantasy. It is these (mythic) communities, most evocative of 'our' 'way of life' that are under threat from 'troubled' and troubling

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[1] *Media Image, Community Impact* provides a wealth of evidence of the extremes to which such representations were taken, describing, for example, a cartoon in which a '[m]an with phrase book asks police "excuse me where can I find free HIV treatment?' (ICRA, 2004: 31).

others from distant parts of the world. That threat is here sanctioned—in typically breezy, 'common-sense' terms—as a legitimate cause for concern.

In *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* Zygmunt Bauman addressed the 'new centrality of "immigrant" and "asylum seeker" problems to the contemporary political agenda' (Bauman, 2004: 7). Using an argument that draws close, in places, to Giorgio Agamben's earlier exploration of the new centrality of the biopolitical category of 'bare life' in Western society in his 1995 work *Homo Sacer* (1995), Bauman suggests that contemporary crises over immigration and 'asylum' should be understood in terms of globalised society being confronted with, and recoiling from, its own 'waste'. As he puts it: 'Refugees, the displaced, asylum seekers, migrants, the *sans papiers*, they are the waste of globalization' (58). The drive of modernity has always been such that it produces '"human waste", or [...] wasted humans' (5), Bauman suggests. However where early modernity found spaces to either contain or export this waste, 'dumping it' in geographically distant colonies (penal colonies, in the latter case), the current *'liquid'* state of modernity leads to an similarly fluid movement of global human waste across the globe, and to its increasing drift back towards Western shores. Hence the emergence of the migratory archetype of the 'asylum seeker'/'illegal' immigrant, and hence too the designation of this figure as an abject, 'ideal "deviant other"' (56). Gesturing towards the grossly irresponsible 'elective affinity' constructed in the media between would-be refugees and terrorists, Bauman reminds us, in an extremely important choice of words, that: 'Making associations may be murderous' (57).

Here we come back to issues of *visibility*, and to the politics that comes with any attempt to 'recognise', represent, and de-'other' the 'asylum seeker'. In 'Welcome to Britain: The Cultural Politics of Asylum', Imogen Tyler explores further some of the implications of the cultural construction of the figure of the 'asylum seeker' as an abject 'other' against whom communal boundaries are formed. Tyler's argument here follows and develops the basic point raised by Bauman: namely that the 'asylum seeker', as a demonised figure within the cultural imaginary, is brought into play as a limit against which political and communal 'bodies' can be formed, granting 'us': 'the pleasures of secure identification: we are British, we have a way of life, we must protect it' (Tyler, 2006: 192). Importantly, Tyler brings this argument back to the issue of the 'asylum seeker's' *visibility*. Pointing to media scares around 'asylum' of the kind analysed by Bauman and by the ICAR, she suggests that, as a rhetorical *figure,* the asylum seeker 'is not invisible, but rather hypervisible. However, this

hypervisibility (of the asylum-seeker-as-hate-object) works to screen asylum seekers from view' (193).

Sensationalist representations of the kind favoured by the tabloid media—which foster negative 'recognitions' of asylum seekers through association with the dirty, infected, threatening, criminal—offer a clear example of this process of 'hypervisibility as concealment' at work. Significantly, however, Tyler also suggests that similar processes of 'hypervisibility as concealment' can be identified as running also through seemingly more well-intentioned texts, and that liberal, and even apparently 'radical' attempts at 'recognising' asylum seekers and other such culturally abject(ed) figures can in fact risk confirming the 'us'/'them' division that they seek to disrupt. In attempting to counter negative recognitions of 'asylum seekers' as criminals, terrorists, and carriers of disease, such texts run through a different set of identifications—of asylum seekers as helpless 'victim', for example—which can work to re-cast them as other on different terms. Tyler suggests, therefore that the 'asylum seeker' risks becoming, 'a figure through which "we" narrate other cultural fantasies—fantasies of benevolence, for example' (195).

Questioning the existing forms and tropes of 'recognition' through which the 'asylum-seeker', as 'figure', simultaneously appears and disappears from view, Tyler explicitly calls, in this light, for new forms of 'seeing' that would combat this process. As she puts it:

> We must attend to the violent foreclosure that accompanies 'figuration' not only in humanitarian, political, and news media accounts, but also in purportedly radical [...] accounts of the 'asylum-seeker' and 'the refugee'. One of the ways we might do this is by thinking more subtly about the differences between 'recognition' and 'identification'; in particular, the ways in which 'gestures of recognition', in the act of recognizing, might become aware of their own limits, their own universalism and ethnocentric bias. (199)

Wiping the Frame: *Dirty Pretty Things*

It is with such concerns in mind that we should come back to Sinclair's *Sight and Sound* critique of Stephen Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things*. As we have seen, Sinclair attacks the 'tabloid sentimentality' of this film as well as its central thesis—as he sees it—of the 'invisibility' of 'asylum seekers, the lost souls of London' (Sinclair, 2002: 32). In the light of what has been seen above, this attack—which contains, of course, a competitive element—begins to look particularly significant. Sinclair suggests that

Frears 'misreads the disintegrating Balkanised cityscape of the present' (33), effectively accusing the filmmaker of misunderstanding precisely what, and who, is visible and *invisible* within the contemporary city. The implication of course is that *he* (Sinclair) sees what Frears does not, and is closer to this shared subject matter than the Bafta-winning and self-confessedly 'vulgar' filmmaker (in Shoard, 2002:).

In this review—tellingly entitled 'Heartsnatch Hotel'—Sinclair quotes Frears on the phenomenon of 'illegal immigration' as stating that, 'it's new – it wasn't there when I was a child' (in Sinclair, 2002: 32). Another mistake, suggests Sinclair:

> ...he's wrong. London is a city of exiles, economic migrants. Everybody comes from somewhere else, they always have: Huguenots, Jews, Bangladeshis, Vietnamese. From Albanians peddling sawdust cigarettes in resealed Marlboro packets, exploited squeegee kids, sweatshop women waiting by pre-firebombed railway arches, they are sempiternal. But they're in the wrong film, hitting on neorealism when it no longer plays. (32-33)

Sinclair argues that these 'everyday'-migrants find themselves 'in the wrong film'—standing in as the cast of the unmade 'neo-realist' film that *Dirty Pretty Things* is *not*. The central thrust of Sinclair's critique of *Dirty Pretty Things,* and on Frears as a filmmaker, therefore hinges upon a representational relationship with the 'real'. Sinclair argues that *Dirty Pretty Things*' relationship with 'realism' is of a tentative and unstable kind that belongs in television, rather than film. 'As soon as you start cutting, reality doesn't play', Sinclair suggests. 'That's where television—and films that belong in the TV mindset—sell themselves short. They don't allow for breathing space. Too much narrative' (33). It is this lack of 'breathing space' that ultimately bedevils *Dirty Pretty Things*, he suggests, throttling the film into a state of 'last-gasp TV realism' (34).

Alternatives to this are explored, with Sinclair nodding approvingly, if briefly, towards Pawel Pawlinowski's (2001) 'Margate fable' (Sinclair, 2002: 34) *Last Resort* (more on which below) before coming to a more familiar cast of names. In opposition to the asphyxiated television 'realism' of Frears, Sinclair positions practitioners of what he calls 'the [filmic] topographic essay form' (2002: 34): 'Andrew Kötting, Patrick Keiller, Chris Petit' (34). These filmmakers, familiar presences within Sinclair's work and collaborative circle, *allow* their 'essays' 'breathing space', he suggests, letting the camera run, allowing it to *see*. 'The point is', Sinclair argues, 'that film essayists find their voice in place, and know when to keep quiet; television narratives begin with a story and then set out to find an appropriate backdrop' (34).

Where the topographic essayists named above, along with filmmakers such as Kaurismäki, Skolimowski and John Boorman—also name-checked in this article—have drawn upon 'the sprawl of London' (34) to produce films of 'bleak surrealism' (34)—as Sinclair puts it, importantly—the London of *Dirty Pretty Things* portrays only dishonest scenarios painted over with a veneer of 'snatched reality' (34).

Referring to Frears' 1990 adaptation of pulp-writer Jim Thompson's novel *The Grifters*, Sinclair suggests that the filmmaker 'extracts the venom, the hard-liver psychosis' (33) from the original, sanitising and re-packaging it 'for mass-consumption' (33). The suggestion is that the subject matter and source material of *Dirty Pretty Things*—including, ultimately, London itself—is also humanised, explicated, and made culturally digestible. The film is, for Sinclair, overly *clean*: 'Not enough dirty, too much pretty' (34). In a suggestive metaphor, Sinclair therefore suggests that, 'Frears wipes the frame' (33) within which his realities are seen and presented.

Sinclair attacks *Dirty Pretty Things* as 'the visual equivalent of a Booker shortlist item', an amalgam of 'memory traces of discontinued forms—thriller, gothic—with "significant" undertones (asylum seekers, the invisible)' (34). We should note a certain hubris here, however. Such an attack can only be sustained on an assumption that, as visionary London psychogeographer, Sinclair sees what the culturally-sanctioned filmmaker does not. Invested in place, locale, Sinclair is, lest we forget, deeply immersed in a documentary practice of 'noticing everything' in his surrounding environment. Or is he? Critical responses to Sinclair's work have taken issue with precisely this claim, pointing out puzzling, and indeed troubling, lapses in what Sinclair does and does not *see* in the territories and communities that surround him.

Leading the charge here is Peter Brooker, who, responding principally to *Downriver*—a work ostensibly committed to exploring traces of immigration and settlement in the city—exposes certain perplexing absences in Sinclair's vision. Whilst noting that *Downriver* weaves into its fabric a number of references to 'earlier [London] immigrants and colonised others' (Brooker, 2002: 103), from the ever-intriguing David Rodinsky to the Aboriginal cricketer 'King Coal', Brooker suggests that the novel largely *fails* to acknowledge and engage with the contemporary ethnic communities of London's East-End. In particular, Brooker suggests that for Sinclair: 'the newer ethnic community of Bangladeshis, whose great Mosque now occupies the

site of a former synagogue in Whitechapel's Fournier Street, are as if invisible' (103). Hence the irony that Sinclair, '[t]he artist who would notice everything in his chosen territory […] barely registers the majority population of that area' (103).

If Sinclair is unable, or unwilling, to include the majority population of his chosen territory in his representational 'frame', what hope that he will find space there for more socially marginal, disavowed figures? Perhaps more worryingly still in this regard, where Bangladeshis *are* recognised by Sinclair in *Downriver* they are portrayed in a largely negative light. Taking his cue from Brooker, Brian Baker draws attention to a disturbing passage in the book which describes 'Banglatown' as the domain of, among other things, 'Vulture priests, percolating hatred from beneath their turbans, bearded in a nest of absolutes' (*DRV*: 345); (in Baker, 2007: 94). As Baker notes, this passage seems quite obviously 'infected with Islamophobia' (Baker, 2007: 95), and indeed it is worth noting that Sinclair's language here comes perilously close to anticipating precisely the kind of discourse documented in the ICAR report.

Both Baker and Robert Sheppard suggest that the atmosphere of suspicion, if not outright hostility, that infuses the portrayal of Islamic culture in *Downriver* should be seen as cultural fall-out from the furore surrounding the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, and the subsequent fatwa issued against that author in 1989.[2] In this context, Sinclair's failure to register the Islamic communities around him begins to look, in fact, more like a deliberate refusal. Indeed, Sheppard suggests that in *Downriver* the impact of Bangladeshi immigration on the material geography of the East End is depicted by Sinclair as *getting in the way* of his visionary experience of the city. 'When the building of a Whitechapel mosque merely works to obstruct the "unashamed voyeurism of the incarcerated onanist" resident in the "Imperial fantasy" of the Monster Doss House', he writes, 'the Moslem culture is not invisible, it is blocking the view' (Sheppard, 2007: 62).

Reverse (Colon)ialism; 'Immigration, Storage, Distribution'

We might say that a different view, and a different frame, is required, therefore. In Sinclair's *Dining on Stones*, a novel that is, as several critics have noted, offered as a kind of 'sequel' (in the loosest possible sense of the word) to *Downriver*, we encounter 'a sort of marine cousin to Jack London's "Monster Doss House"' (*DOS*:

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[2] Sheppard notes, for example, that at the time of *Downriver's* publication there was a banner hung across Brick Lane calling for Rushdie's book to be banned (Sheppard, 2007: 62).

51)—hulking above the Hastings beach that provides the backdrop for this book. This is not the only connection between these two works. Where *Downriver* had offered an examination of London's 'rivers and railways' (*DRV*: 531) as a parallel to the riverine landscapes of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in *Dining on Stones*, as we are told in a meta-commentary within the book itself, '[t]he model will be Conrad, *Nostromo*' (*DOS:* 404). The Conradian links between these two books are underlined throughout, but are perhaps made most evident in *Dining on Stones'* status as a 'visual text' (Baker, 2007: 117).[3]

Reviewing *Downriver* in *The London Review of Books* at the time of its release, Angela Carter noted that: 'Iain Sinclair, in the profane spirit of Surrealism, has chosen to decorate the endpapers of his new work of fiction with a dozen unutterably strange picture-postcards' (Carter, 1991: 17). This is a reference to what are described retrospectively in *Dining on Stones* by Sinclair himself, as a series of 'Conradian postcards [...] found in Brick Lane market' (*DOS:* 46). In the later novel these profanely 'surreal' images are echoed by a number of photographs supposedly recovered from a Kodak camera belonging to the great grandfather of A.M Norton—the by-now familiar protagonist of this novel—detailing a quasi-Conradian expedition to South America undertaken in the late 1800's.[4] A colonial explorer—and, indeed, an 'economic migrant' of a very particular kind—Norton's relative leaves behind, so the conceit has it, a number of documents and texts detailing his 'last, mad journey into the Peruvian interior' (*DOS*: 28) in search of the promise of fortunes to be made (and lost) in the coffee plantations of that continent.

The provenance of these images, along with a selection of maps and extracts from the nineteenth-century Norton's diary, is not explicitly confirmed within *Dining on Stones* itself, but the book's dedication to 'Arthur Sinclair' provides us with a strong clue. In fact, as Sinclair has clarified in interview, the 'Kodak' pictures, maps, and diary extracts worked into the fabric of *Dining on Stones* are the legacy of Sinclair's *own* great-grandfather, who completed an expedition to South America in the late 1800's, and published a diary of his experiences there. Via the inclusion of direct

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[3] For an exploration of Sinclair's intertextual responses to Conrad see, for example, Robert Hampson 'Re-Writing Conrad', in Bond and Bavidge's *City Visions: The Work of Iain Sinclair* (Hampson, 2007: 110-119).

[4] Underlining the importance of tropes of fracture and doubling, as felt in the recurrent appearance of doppelgangers and 'fetches' throughout *Dining on Stones*, Norton is split in this novel between two 'separate' characters: appearing as both the Hackney based 'Andy Norton', and the Hastings's exile 'A.M Norton'. As Robert Sheppard notes, this is a split which stands 'as a reflection of Sinclair's own division of labour' (Sheppard, 2007: 22) at this point of his career.

extracts from this book, Arthur Sinclair becomes a collaborative presence in *Dining on Stones*—guiding the narrative set down by his psychogeographically minded great-grandson. [5] Indeed these texts become a point of orientation for the main expeditionary journey of *Dining on Stones*: a walk out of London along the A13, which carries Sinclair/Norton '[s]ixty miles out' (*DOS*: 276) of London, to Hastings. Pawing over the South American material, 'our' contemporary Norton/ Sinclair suggests that: 'I took the Peruvian journals as a literal guide: like for like. A shifting landscape of equivalents' (*DOS*: 29).

The topographies of Peru are thus overlaid and intermingled, brought into *association*, with those of the London/Essex hinterlands that haunt Sinclair's works *London Orbital, White Goods* and, even more so, *Dining on Stones*. For Norton, 'The River Roding, disgorging in a septic scum into the Thames, became the Rio Perene. The man-made, conical alp of the Beckton ski slope stood in for the foothills of the Andes' (*DOS*: 29). This is a landscape which, as Sinclair first realises in a late section of *London Orbital*, has become a frontier territory of 'Blood and Oil', where new fortunes are being forged through economies based around an unholy trinity of, 'immigration, storage, distribution' (*LO*: 492). Along with property, these are the main themes of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Sinclair suggests, and coming to one of the settings of that book at Purfleet, Sinclair suddenly realises that Stoker's book is a narrative of *asylum*, too: 'yesterday's Undead are today's asylum seekers' (*LO*: 486), as he puts it.

Equivalent landscapes: Peru and Essex. Extracts from the explorer's 'journal' tell us that, arriving at the port of Colon in Panama, he encountered a scene of nightmarish exoticism in a settlement which lived up to its name: *It is not merely the disreputable appearance of its degenerate people, nor the frequent squabbles dignified by the name of revolutions that we fear, but the ever-present filth which is more dangerous to life*' (*DOS*: 29 original emphasis). As the twenty-first century Norton puts it: 'the Scots Calvinist felt as if he were crawling into the continent by the back-door: caecum to rectum, a yellow worm in a hunk of rotten meat' (*DOS*: 29). Seeking to make his fortune through the cultivation of coffee, Norton's great-grandfather attempts to force a passage into South America through its excremental 'back-door'. This, of course, brings us back to Bauman's evocative depiction of those attempting a reversal

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[5] As Sinclair explains in *The Verbals*: 'My great-grandfather, Arthur Sinclair, wrote an account of his life which is about the size of a book of stamps. His style, I found, was quite close to my own [...] a book about the Amazon—which I've got—with maps and other details, which I've drawn on from time to time' (*VBLS*: 14-15).

of the migrations of the colonial period, as 'human waste': waste which, as abject matter, seeking re-entry, radically troubles and transgresses the boundaries of the political and communal 'bodies' of Europe.[6]

Dining on Stones' sinister Mr Mocatta—'[t]he Dracula of Winchelsea' (*DOS*: 67)—owner of a 'marine property empire, "slums for bums", that ran from Seaford to Hastings' (*DOS*: 50), identifies asylum seekers as 'the coming commodity. Better than oil. Better than, or twinned with, drugs' (*DOS*: 50). Where Norton's, and indeed Sinclair's, great grandfather had attempted to make a fortune via an out-bound colonial journey into the heart of South America, in the contemporary era fortunes are to be had by dealing with the *import*, storage, and distribution of the 'human waste' of global Empire: 'hauling human landfill, Kurds and Afghans in sealed containers' (*DOS*: 47). Where in *London Orbital*, therefore, the M25 had been represented in terms of a heart, constantly pumping blood around the arteries of the city, in *Dining on Stones* the A13 becomes an uncoiled colon, sucking in and expelling 'human waste'.

Seeking Asylum: The Cruel Seaside

At the end of this metaphorical 'waste' pipe, we come, of course, to that ever-convenient dumping ground for all human effluent: the sea itself. We arrive too at the place at which cast off detritus has an uncanny habit of *washing back up*: namely the beach, and the topography of what Sinclair has termed, aptly enough 'The Cruel Seaside'. This description comes in another *Sight and Sound* review by Sinclair, this time of Pawel Pawlinowski's *Last Resort*, released the year before *Dirty Pretty Things*. This film—another 'asylum seeker' drama, received a far more favourable review by Sinclair—who praised Pawlinoski's ability, as a migrant filmmaker himself, to illustrate Margate's status as '[a] dispirited site for human landfill. Those banished by Jack Straw [...] Sea the colour of used gum. Sky like dead copydex' (Sinclair, 2001: 16). 'New Labour', Sinclair argues, 'has decreed that certain zones are never to be mentioned. Margate is a sanctioned nowhere, a dumping ground for immigrants, runaways and inner-city scroungers' (18).

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[6] Sinclair here anticipates, by a narrow margin, an analogy also explored by Hardt and Negri in *Multitude*, where they suggest that, '[t]he vampire is one figure that expresses the monstrous, excessive, and unruly character of the flesh of the multitude. Since Bram Stoker's Count Dracula landed in Victorian England, the vampire has been a threat to the social body' (Hardt & Negri, 2005: 193).

The year before *Last Resort's* release, Sinclair had in fact directed his own 'Margate' film, in the form of his collaboration with Chris Petit, *Asylum*—the final instalment of the loose trilogy of films produced for Channel Four between 1993 and 2000. This film, presented as a study of 'memory, exile and madness' (Petit & Sinclair, 2000), acts as an unofficial bridge between the concerns of *The Falconer, Rodinsky's Room, London Orbital*, and *Dining on Stones*. Incorporating visual material gathered by Sinclair and Marc Atkins during the walks written up in the short 1999 book *Dark Lanthorns: Rodinsky's A-Z*—including grainy footage (shot by Marc Atkins) of the foreboding Claybury Mental Hospital where Rodinsky's sister was 'incarcerated' (*DL*: 19-21), and through which the drift of *London Orbital* swings at various points— *Asylum* nevertheless moves away from Sinclair's more familiar topographies. Picking up where *The Falconer* leaves off, the film begins with the body of that film's protagonist, Françoise Lacroix, being washed ashore on the bleak sands of a British beach that is soon revealed to be Margate.

Robert Bond has argued that in Sinclair's later work, '[a] shared geographical dislocation is seen to unite unwanted urban natives with asylum seekers and economic migrants' (2005a: 79). This impulse—which comes to the fore in *Dining on Stones*—can also be detected more subtly in *Asylum*. In *Rodinsky's Room* Sinclair had described Michael Moorcock, 'the great Londoner' (*RR*: 270) existing in a state of self-imposed exile in his home outside Austin, Texas, surviving in a hostile milieu only by hooking himself up to a drip feed of English culture: '[a]irmailed English newspapers and magazines [...] tapes of Radio 4 programmes' (*RR*: 270). In *Asylum* Sinclair and Petit take this a step further, drawing out the full strangeness of Moorcock's cultural exile by presenting footage of this out-of place writer (Stetson-on-head, walking two cats on a lead) wandering the resolutely un-English landscapes of his adopted home. Physically allergic to virtually everything in Texas, Moorcock lolls in the back of a car driven by the film's editor and regular Petit/Sinclair collaborator Emma Matthews, describing the 'isolation' that comes from inhabiting a culture 'that doesn't want you' (Petit & Sinclair, 2002).[7]

The American poet Ed Dorn, too, is portrayed as *out of place* in this film. Interviewed by Sinclair (who remains off camera) very shortly before his death in 1999, the visibly

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[7] Matthews is editor of all three Sinclair/Petit major Sinclair/ Petit films. She appears as a 'character' in *The Falconer* and *Asylum*, and her paintings, developed from film stills, feature in *White Goods*, a text of which she is listed as co-author along with Sinclair (Sinclair & Matthews, 2002d).

frail and emotional poet appears throughout the film only in indistinct locations. A narrative fantasy is developed which suggests that Dorn is a prisoner, shuttled around undisclosed locations in the UK, one step ahead of the team of cultural investigators attempting to track him down. At one point, however, 'Agent [Emma] Matthews' does nearly catch up with the poet at Margate, where we hear that Dorn is being held in a tower-block hospital overshadowing the seaside-resorts 'Dreamland' pleasure beach. Here the trail goes dry, and arriving at Dorn's room at the 'Dreamland Hospital' (Petit & Sinclair, 2000) the investigators arrive to find that the exiled writer has been *displaced* by refugees of a different kind: his room taken over by 'Albanian squatters' (Petit & Sinclair, 2000).

Sinclair and Petit here present a strange overlap or frisson: an American poet held prisoner (so the fantasy has it), in the heart of a British seaside resort, only to be displaced in turn by incoming Albanian refugees. Margate's 'Dreamland', then, as captured on the over-saturated video footage worked into the weave of *Asylum*, becomes a place of unexpected dispersals, frictions, and juxtapositions: a fractured and fragmented landscape, or *dreamscape*, across which various lines of tradition and affinity come into contact. It is perhaps no surprise then that in both 'The Cruel Seaside' and *Asylum* Margate is noted as a place a place 'crucial to the trajectory of modernism' (Sinclair, 2001: 18); the frontier across which 'the kernel of twentieth century consciousness split open' (Sinclair & Petit, 2000). This, as is quickly made clear, is a reference to T. S. Eliot and *The Waste Land:* partly written, we're told, when Eliot—another American *émigré* poet of course—was 'exiled' from London to the coastal town whilst convalescing from a serious nervous breakdown, prompting the famous lines, intoned by Petit in *Asylum*: 'On Margate sands/ I can connect/ Nothing with nothing' (Eliot, 1999: 34, 300-303).

The spirit of Eliot's apprehension of fractured connectivity, the connection of 'nothing' with 'nothing', hangs over *Asylum's* Margate, and across the film itself, inviting us both to make connections and, simultaneously, to unpick them. It is worth noting in this light that the sections of *Asylum* set in Dreamland offer a conscious if semi-covert homage to Lindsay Anderson's 1953 short *Oh Dreamland*, a film also acknowledged by Sinclair in 'The Cruel Seaside' as part of Margate's perhaps surprisingly rich artistic heritage. Here Sinclair described:

> Anderson's self-financed short *O Dreamland* [which] sees the funfair and pleasure ground, once a proper metropolitan excursion [...] as a sequence of

hellish close-ups. The leather jacketed patrician was clearly repelled by the noise of proles at play. (Sinclair, 2001: 18)

Ian Walker, in his excellent study of British Surrealist photography and film *So Exotic, So Homemade*, has noted that *O Dreamland* has indeed attracted controversy for its 'unflinching image of Dreamland as a crude, bleak place populated by alien visitors' (Walker, 2007: 164), and through, 'its 'sharp, almost vicious juxtapositions, its claustrophobia, the unnerving dissociations of image and sound' (165). However, Walker goes on to suggest that this short film also has redeeming 'elements of surrealism embedded' in it (165), and hence argues, importantly, that: 'Anderson may have been justified in believing that Margate offered nightmares rather than dreams, but nightmare is also a state of mind in which excess leads to the destabilisation of a sense of normality' (165). Dreamland, pushed to the point of (surrealist) nightmare, Walker suggests, might lead to an excessive state in which sensory, and representational, norms are destabilised.

Here we should come back to Sinclair's reading of Margate in 'The Cruel Seaside'. Setting up another point of contrast to 'Sentimental Idiot' Stephen Frears (Shoard, 2002)—himself a former collaborator of Lindsay Anderson's, as Sinclair points out—Sinclair suggests that in the Margate of *Last Resort*: '[s]entimental realism, in the warp of the late-millennium Kent coast, is translated into surrealism' (Sinclair, 2001: 16).[8] The implication here is important. In the 'warp of the late millennium', and indeed in the early *new* millennium, realism might give way to *surrealism*, as a means of countering 'sentimental', or 'heartsnatching' narratives—and as a means of documenting and *seeing*, the 'human landfill' washed up on the symbolically-weighted topographies of the British coast.[9]

Social Surrealism at the Seaside: Watching the Industrial Refugees

In this light, it is perhaps no surprise that Sinclair chooses to present us, early on in *Dining on Stones*, with a 'surreal' perspective that allows him to return to his

[8] Sinclair notes in 'The Cruel Seaside', that Frears began his cinematic career working as 'assistant director on [Lindsey Anderson's] *If*' (Sinclair, 2001: 18).
[9] An important contemporary meditation upon the legacies of 'seaside surrealism' can also be found in the work of the occasional Sinclair collaborator, and fellow St. Leonards resident Andrew Kötting, whose 1997 film *Gallivant* mounts a quixotic expedition around the British coast. Acknowledged as an inspiration by Sinclair, the film also exploits the overlapping waves of nostalgia and avant-garde juxtapositions found along the length of the British seaside. As Kötting, puts it in a reflection on the film included in Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris's *Modernism on Sea* (2009), the film was inspired by an atmosphere of 'Knickerbockerglories, 99s, deck chairs and the funny ha-ha of a Punch and Judy./ Dada' (Kötting, 2009: 45).

preoccupation both with the contemporary 'visibility' of 'asylum seekers' and to his earlier attacks on Stephen Frears. In the opening pages of this novel we find Sinclair's lowlife researcher Jos Kaporal—himself a 'refugee' of both Sinclair's *Landor's Tower* and *Asylum*—stationed '[a]t the high window, above Hastings' Warrior Square' (*DOS*: 45), looking down on the beach to make the following observation:

> Stephen Frears can't have taken an away-day to the coast when he said—of a lowlife romance he was promoting [*Dirty Pretty Things*]—that asylum seekers and economic immigrants were 'invisible', the unseen of the city. If this lot had been any more visible you'd have to stick a preservation order on them. (*DOS*: 52)[10]

Playing with the perspective offered by this shabby hotel window, Kaporal switches frame: 'shut[ing] one eye after another' (*DOS*: 45), indulging, as Sinclair puts it, importantly, in 'surreal contrivances to temper anomie' (*DOS*: 45). Kaporal thus becomes the latest in a long line of observers drawn to participate in what Sinclair (2005b) describes in *The Edge of the Orison* as an 'English rite of passage at the seaside (social surrealism)' (*EOTO*: 69); and one of a number of characters in *Dining on Stones* who take up observant positions as 'Weary mortals […] Modest in bus shelters. Boarding houses. At high windows' (*DOS*: 15). Foremost among these observers is 'A.M Norton, 60. Sixty miles out. Leaning on the balcony at the stern of a great white boat, Cunard Court […] It's good, he thought, to have someone to look down upon' (*DOS*: 276).

Echoing Sinclair's sentiments in 'The Cruel Seaside' Lara Feigel and Alexandra Harris have suggested recently that the British seaside has an under-examined place in the topography of the modern, and *modernist*, avant-garde. In their introduction to *Modernism on Sea: Art and Culture at the British Seaside*, they suggest that:

> The devoted observer of modern life would certainly find plenty to interest him [sic] on the esplanade: sunbathing, crowd—mingling, sexual license, *surreal juxtapositions*, the modernist architecture of the lido; or, in more metaphorical terms, the experience of being on the edge, caught between the vast sea and the small human pleasures of the shore. (Feigel and Harris, 2009: 3, my emphasis)

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[10] 'Kaporal' is a fictional avatar used by Sinclair in various fictions, including *Landor's Tower*, *Asylum* and *Dining on Stones*, for the journalist, filmmaker and Petit associate John Sergeant, who also features as a collaborative presence in the *London Orbital* film.

Among the 'dedicated observers of modern life' who *were* drawn to explore the 'surreal juxtapositions' of the seaside resort—and, like Sinclair's Kaporal, to explore the dislocated perspectives offered by its boarding houses—were the surrealist-influenced artists, journalists, photographers, and poets involved in the collaborative project of Mass-Observation (M-O) in the 1930s. Drawing upon a typically anthropological language, Tom Harrisson had declared, in the early years of M-O, that '[s]qualid boarding houses will become for the Observer what the entrails of the dogfish are to the zoologist' (in Calder & Sheridan, 1984: 64), and this impulse was acted upon in 1937, when M-O sent a team of Observers to explore the working class seaside resort of Blackpool, to observe and report on the behaviour of the holidaying masses of 'Worktown' (Bolton), and, in doing so, to present 'a picture of English civilization which may at times seem un-English' (in Cross, 1990: 19).

In his introduction to *Worktowners at Blackpool*, his version of the unfinished M-O book that was to be produced on Blackpool, Gary Cross notes, importantly, that by the 1930s the holiday, predominantly taken at resorts around the British seaside, 'had become a right of citizenship' (Cross, 1990: 9), quoting a report produced by Harold Laski and Clement Attlee which referred to the holidaying masses visiting resorts such as Blackpool each year as '*industrial refugees* [escaping] the misery and drabness of their everyday lives' (in Cross, 1990: 9, my emphasis). Heading out to Blackpool, Mass-Observation investigated the seaside breaks of these 'industrial refugees' as a time and space of 'exception'—to use Agamben's terminology—outside the temporal constraints of everyday life. The (primitive) religious-undertones of the holiday experience were emphasised here: 'The holiday week is the axis dividing six months of work from six months of work. It is an extension, but with wider liberties, of Sunday' (in Cross, 1990: 40). As a time in which '[w]ork is compulsorily stopped' (40), the holidaying masses were granted a brief 'release from the constraints of time' (159). For the holidaying workers of Blackpool, M-O suggested, the week of leisure was one in which the routines and *rhythms* of everyday life were radically disrupted: 'At Blackpool, Worktowners step into a new *rhythm* of life' (145 my emphasis).

In a move that neatly anticipated the later work of Lefebvre, therefore—who in *Rhythmanalysis* also suggested that high windows might offer the best perspective on the movements of everyday life—the Mass-Observers stationed in Blackpool took it upon themselves to conduct what can only be described as a *rythmanalysis* of the

days of the holidaying masses.[11] Keeping certain couples under close observation as they went about their daily business, the team produced minutely detailed analysis of the 'rhythm[s] of rest and movement' (in Cross, 1990: 150) that made up the routine of worker's holidays. What emerged very quickly from this was that the holiday as a 'time outside time' was very often dominated by routines of its own, regimented by the meal times and locking out times of guesthouses, for example, and by the problems of eking out often miniscule budgets over a whole week of 'fun'. Temporarily 'liberated' from the strict regimentations of the factory production line, M-O suggested that workers found themselves immersed in a similarly ordered regime of leisure: '[t]he new routine they do assume is that imposed on them from an outside source, from the landlady with her times of closing the door, of morning meals, of meals during the day' (in Cross, 1990: 151).

Constrained by limited resources, and discouraged from remaining still, M-O suggested that holiday makers were in effect forced into a form of involuntary, or at least only semi-voluntary mass *flânerie*. In the heavily commercialised and, in its own way, ordered, leisure environment, 'watching and walking' were among the only free activities on offer, and hence the crowds whose activities Mass-Observation had travelled to the coast to survey spent large parts of their day wandering the beaches and promenades *observing* each other. Fascinated by this phenomenon of 'hundreds of thousands of people wandering about all day' (152), M-O suggested that 'Watching and walking are the dominant Blackpool activities […] and it is the massing of thousands of people doing all these same things that makes the amorphous mob' (151).

As in Sinclair's reading of Lindsay Anderson's *O Dreamland*, in which he chides a 'patrician' filmmaker 'clearly repelled by the […] proles at play', Mass-Observation's activities in Blackpool have been stridently criticised for their propensity, in spite of their professed desire to present an 'un-English' portrait of a marginal nation-within-a-nation, to fall back into the most damagingly normative of cultural modes of representation and of *seeing*. Peter Gurney, as we saw in Chapter Two, has presented a notably virulent critique of this particular instance of ethnographic seaside 'surrealism', arguing forcefully that the Mass-Observers who came to Blackpool in 1937 did so burdened with a project 'shot through with an intentionality informed by particular class and gender assumptions' (Gurney, 1997: 259). Whilst certainly

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[11] Suggesting points from which to *look down* upon the life of the street, Lefebvre argues in *Rhythmanalysis* that '[a] balcony does the job admirably […] in the absence of which you could content yourself with a window' (Lefebvre, 2004: 27-28).

intrigued by the activities of the 'industrial refugees' at play on the Blackpool esplanade, Gurney suggests, for the predominantly male and middle-class 'Observers' this fascination was of an essentially voyeuristic and prurient kind—handicapped from the outset by M-O's (and particularly Tom Harrisson's) self-confidence in the scientific 'objectivity' of their wider project.[12]

In the dreamland of the seaside, '[f]ascination and disgust went hand in hand for many observers' (260), Gurney argues—and hence the quasi-ethnographic delve into the workings and rhythms of 'squalid boarding houses', and their working-class inhabitants was motivated as much by Middle-Class prurience as 'scientific' rigour. In the case of the 'mob' activity perceived by M-O in the 'watching and walking' industrial crowds, Gurney argues, in the full knowledge of the distinction that Raymond Williams famously delineated between 'mob' and 'masses', that: '[i]n short, we can say that Mass-Observation found mob activity because that is what they wanted to find' (Gurney, 1997: 64).[13]

Awaiting Recognition: Walking and Watching

For the ethnographic Mass-Observers working in Blackpool in 1937—also glad, we might say, like Sinclair's Norton, 'to have someone to look down upon'—the 'industrial refugees' escaping their factories for a week of leisure did so only to find themselves confronted with a regimented temporality of leisure in which the landlady and the boarding house replaced the foreman and the factory floor. Compelled to spend their days endlessly circulating the public spaces of the seaside town, 'walking and watching' *each other* whilst also kept under close surveillance by the Mass-Observers watching *them*, the masses temporarily displaced from 'Worktown' assumed—at least in the eyes of their middle class 'Observers'—the status of an indistinct and anonymous 'mob'. As shown above, 'mob' was also one of the words highlighted in the ICAR report on negative media reports on asylum seekers (ICAR, 2004: 35), and with this in mind we should come back too to the view of the St. Leonards esplanade offered by Sinclair's Kaporal in *Dining on Stones*.

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[12] Gurney quotes Harrisson as boasting, for example, that 'A person with a public-school background can understand the ideas and attitudes of a cannibal Malekulan as easily as he can understand those of a Welsh coal miner' (in Gurney, 1997: 260).
[13] Williams famously suggested, in 1958's *Culture and Society*, that 'There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses' (Williams, 1962: 289); '"masses=lower and middle classes' is so commonly confused with "masses=mob". The mob, if there is one, is at almost everyone's elbow: it may, indeed, be even nearer than that' (296).

There are no holiday makers in sight on this stretch of Hastings the seaside, but nonetheless the experience of those 'industrial refugees' shadowed by Mass-Observation in the 1930s finds a distorted, and indeed *surreal*, echo here under the watchful eyes of Kaporal/Sinclair. Taking in a view from his window that is 'better than electricity' (*DOS*: 45), Kaporal observes:

> small groups of bareheaded men in bright leather jackets [...] being turned out of crumbling Victorian buildings (salt-eaten facades, loose window frames); turned loose to slouch on broad pavements. Knowing better than to occupy dew-damp park benches, or to hang about the bowling green. Unwelcome in seaside cafes. Suspect in post offices and charity shops. Pissing in doorways. (*DOS*: 51).

'Turned loose' from the crumbling seaside architecture that provides their temporary shelter, these migrants find themselves displaced and unwelcome within the seaside town in which they are forced to spend their days. Like the Worktowners before them, if for different reasons, they therefore adapt themselves to routines of 'walking and watching'. 'Melancholy men from the Balkans watched the waves', Sinclair writes, 'Kurds followed young women, silently, hungrily, at a respectful distance, never quite becoming a nuisance (*DOS*: 51). Later in *Dining on Stones* he suggests that, '[t]he asylum seekers didn't really *do* anything. They hung about, on the porch of the Adelphi, taking photos of each other. They walked in pairs, groups, or alone, through the gardens. They made calls on their mobiles. They looked at the sea' (*DOS*: 199).

If this day-to-day routine sounds suspiciously like *flânerie*, then it is *flânerie* of an involuntary, enforced kind. The everyday experience of the 'asylum seekers' who come under Sinclair's gaze in *Dining on Stones* is portrayed as one of waiting, filling time. In the crumbling architecture of the seaside resort (an architecture of *leisure*, lest we forget) these men enter into a period of enforced redundancy, a 'six month quarantine' (*DOS*: 428) in which legal work is forbidden. 'They're not allowed to take paid employment for six months after coming ashore' (*DOS*: 197) notes Kaporal at one point, and the seaside experience of the 'asylum-seekers' in *Dining on Stones* therefore becomes one of semi-tolerated lawlessness—an exercise in surviving, 'off the books' (*DOS*: 51) whilst awaiting legal legitimacy. This 'six month' limnal period of exclusion therefore echoes both the week of exception taken by industrial refugees 'every six months' (Cross, 1991: 40), and, as Sinclair explicitly invites us to note, the cultural 'exile' of the writer marooned 'sixty miles out' from his London abode (*DOS*: 276).

The 'Middle Ground' (Sinclair's knowing sub-title to *Dining on Stones*) that is early twenty-first century Hastings therefore becomes a space of overlap and, potentially, encounter, for at least three categories of cultural and political 'refugees'. The architecture of the seaside resort gives way to carceral uses, and, as Norton/ Sinclair note, in the St. Leonards of the early new millennium: 'rundown hotels and boarding houses were being exploited as holding pens for special category prisoners' (*DOS*: 275).[14] Throughout *Dining on Stones* Sinclair underlines a sympathetic sense of the 'asylum seekers' presence within the seaside town as an intermediary, probationary, stage on a path to a greater invisibility and containment:

> they were asylum seekers at a period when there were no asylums left. [...] But the tide was turning, forward planners had decided to grant the supplicants their wish, access to the biggest asylum of them all. A great V-shaped barrack on the Dartford Salt Marshes was being converted into a holding centre, a place of detention for the men from Sangatte. (*DOS*: 52)

Hanging on to the very outer fringes of this 'dull town, on the edge of Europe', the asylum seeker's grip on their piece of 'allotted territory' is precarious. 'They stood out in this town', Sinclair writes. 'Move away from Warrior Square and the seafront and they'll be tapped, dispersed to Ashford, a plague hospital on Dartford Salt Marshes: shipped out' (*DOS*: 202). Whilst waiting for claims to be processed, asylum seekers are, as Imogen Tyler notes, 'literally pending recognition' (Tyler, 2006: 189). The presence of asylum-seekers in seaside resorts—on beaches, on the steps of hotels and boarding houses—thus becomes, in Sinclair's rendering, an *intermediary* stage in this process.

Two of those undergoing this process, and 'awaiting recognition', in *Dining on Stones* are 'Drin' and 'Achmed', Albanian immigrants (relatives, perhaps, of the squatters who displaced Ed Dorn from his 'Dreamland Hospital' room) who constitute Sinclair's first and, to date, only, attempt at creating *fictional* 'asylum seeker' characters in his work. Playing a supporting role in the cast of *Dining on Stones,* these two cast members are not given much to do in the book. Like the other

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[14] The contemporary use of down-at-heal seaside hotels as 'induction centres' for would-be refugees, and its vitriolic opposition by local residents, is explored in disheartening detail in Ralph Grillo's article 'Saltdean Can't Cope': which details the furore over a proposal to turn an underused hotel facility, the Ocean Hotel, Saltdean, into a temporary holding centre for 'asylum seekers' (Grillo, 2005: 235-260).

asylum-seekers seen here, most of their time is spent 'watching and waiting' in a limbo state whilst passing time in the faded topographies of the seaside town.

In an instance of what David James has termed the 'register of explicit confession' (James, 2007: 150), that is an increasingly prominent feature of Sinclair's later work, the psychogeographer had accused himself in *Landor's Tower*—via a metafictional rant from 'Ketamine Kreep' Bad News Mutton—of being 'incapable of writing blacks or Jews or immigrants of any kind' (*LT:* 285). So it is, we might say, with the displaced Albanians we encounter in *Dining on Stones*. Mostly silent, one-dimensional presences, when these characters *do* speak it is in a risible stock-foreign dialect—'[m]y friend, English friend, you come always at good time' (*DOS:* 53)—used mostly for outlining petty-criminal scams: the most ambitious of which is a hair-brained scheme to kidnap the (somehow quintessentially British) end-of-pier entertainer Max Bygraves. Sinclair treads a rather delicate line here. Clearly aware of cultural and racial stereotypes when he sees them—having criticised Stephen Frears, for example, for incorporating a 'couple of sinister cops, Balkan heavies out of Truffaut' (Sinclair, 2002: 34), into *Dirty Pretty Things*—he nonetheless continues to serve them up in his own fiction, and risks, in doing so, indulging in precisely the kind of 'murderous' associations identified by Bauman.

Robert Sheppard has argued that: 'Sinclair does not try to ventriloquise unknown contemporary others, a speculative white imagining in blackface, as it were' (Sheppard, 2007: 62). If *Dining on Stones* does offer such a 'ventriloquism', it is a notably and indeed a self-consciously unsuccessful one. And we might say, in fact, that this self-consciousness is its saving grace. Sinclair's attempt at writing 'asylum seekers' as characters in *Dining on Stones*, are not in the end characters at all. They are rather, we can suggest, characters in waiting, characters *on probation*—sketches that may or may not be taken up as something more developed in later work. Elsewhere in *Dining on Stones* Sinclair describes a 'team of Kosovans working the lights' (*DOS*: 180) at a junction on one of the arterial roads out of the city as, '[a]ngry, handsome men with pieces missing' (*DOS*: 181). This could stand as a description of Drin and Achmed, too. These are also 'handsome men with pieces missing': pieces missing both from their bodies and from their development, their construction as characters. Sinclair's construction, or perhaps rather de-construction of 'Drin' and 'Achmed' as anti-characters to populate an anti-novel—a text with '[n]o characters, no story, no narrative push' (*DOS*: 71)—thus offers not believable, recognisable human types, but rather characters which highlight and reflect upon the liminal state

of 'asylum seekers' as they wait, in the dilapidated pleasure geographies of the coast, for 'recognition'.

Embracing the Risk: Effie Paleologou

Towards the end of *Dining on Stones*, Sinclair admits that, 'I needed a collaborator, badly' (*DOS*: 421), and indeed whilst Sinclair's exodus to the coast is primarily articulated throughout *Dining on Stones* and associated texts in terms of exile and estrangement, it is important to note that it is a move that also brings him into closer contact with a network of collaborative practitioners based along the shoreline. From the outset of the book onwards, in fact, the motivations behind this seemingly impulsive change in scenery are articulated in terms of a search for new collaborators. Norton tells us early on that 'I came here in search of a Greek woman, a woman who worked only at night' (*DOS*: 8). As is quickly made clear, this is a reference to the photographer Effie Paleologou, a presence first introduced to Sinclair's work and collaborative circle in *London Orbital*.[15] Primarily based in East London, in 2000 Paleologou also produced *The Front*: a startling series of images detailing the panoramas of a nocturnal Hastings, and directly worked by Sinclair into the textual weave of *Dining on Stones* itself.

Mentioned by name in *Dining on Stones* (at least as 'Effie' (*DOS*: 8)), Paleologou also features as a character in this novel, lightly disguised under the avatar 'Ollie/ Livia'. This character is a risk-taker, too, and is depicted by Sinclair as yet another haunter of intervals, watching and waiting for the appropriate levels of darkness to come down upon Hastings before setting off on her nocturnal perambulations. In 'that interval', Sinclair writes, 'Livia stalled, fumed, wave-watched. Like the others. She was distinguished only by the ferocity of her attention. Eyes burning. An addict of otherness' (*DOS*: 208). Like the others, or like the 'others'—the demonised figures constantly lurking just outside the frame—the migrant, female photographer is both out of place and *visible* in the seaside town. And, as Sinclair is careful to note, she is rendered vulnerable by that visibility:

> Her visibility, despite the dark, gender-unspecific clothes, was alarming. London didn't care. It was busy, preoccupied [...] the city belonged to anyone

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[15] Paleologou features in both the *London Orbital* book and film. In the former text her work is referenced by Sinclair (the *Cityscapes* show mentioned above) as he and his fellow walkers visit the Institute for Medical Research (*LO*: 104-106). In the later text she takes a more directly collaborative role, and is shown engaging in her own offshoot of the M25 film project, logging traffic from a window of the Ibis Hotel, West Thurrock (also an important location in *Dining on Stones* (*DOS*: 252-264).

who walked it [...] The coast was a very different proposition. [...] Coastal lowlife were under no obligation to disguise their interest. Their fingering of the imaginary weft, the smooth pelt of this fragrant newcomer. Their prey. A young woman from elsewhere with a large bag. A bag loaded with easily puntable kit. (*DOS*: 206-207)

Here again, therefore, as in the reading of *Radon Daughters*, by David Cunningham encountered in Chapter Three, we find a female character in Sinclair's fiction becoming the object of *voyeuristic* attention. This 'young woman from elsewhere', walking across the lowlife frontier of the nocturnal Hastings esplanade, and indeed across the masculine terrain of Sinclair's text, is in danger: imperilled precisely by her easily recognisable outsider status. Where the contemporary metropolis, Sinclair suggests, might offer a level of freedom, or protective anonymity, to this keenly observant and, to reverse Janet Wolff's famous conflation, highly *visible 'flâneuse'* the liminal territory of the coast presents a decidedly different, and riskier, prospect.[16]

In 'Spaces of Possibility', her introduction to *The Front*, Paleologou's collection of Hastings photographs, Liz Kent, too, picks up on the 'mysteriousness and sense of imminent danger' (Kent, 2000, unpaginated) embedded in these images. She underlines Sinclair's sense that that 'for Paleologou becoming invisible in Hastings was impossible' (2000, unpaginated), suggesting that in these images the 'coastal townscape that has turned into a nightmarish space [...] The bewildering underworld of the dreamscape seems nearby' (unpaginated).

Kent's evocation of a 'dreamscape' suggests a surrealist lineage, of course; and indeed Sinclair works consciously in *Dining on Stones* to position Paleologou's work in relation to two other proto-surrealist photographers and 'nightstalkers'. In *Rodinsky's Room* Sinclair had described the work of the Czech photographer Markéta Luska ová —another migrant female photographer of empty London street scenes—as part of 'a direct line of descent from Eugène Atget by way of Bill Brandt' (*RR*: 7).[17] Quoting Mark Holborn, Sinclair suggested that 'Atget's archive [...] "entered the cannon of surrealism". Lucid dreaming' (*RR*: 7). This neo-surrealist

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[16] For more detailed discussion of the role of the *'flâneuse'* in both the contemporary and, particularly, the 'modern' city, see Janet Wolff's 1985 essay 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity' (Wolf, 1985: 37-46), and Deborah L. Parson's *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (2001).

[17] Brandt was a photographer known for capturing the essence of a very different kind of urban darkness: photographing London during the blackouts imposed by Blitz. Ian Walker describes him as locating in this darkened metropolis, 'a subject that would enable him to reread his adopted country [Brandt was born in Germany] in terms of the uncanny and the strange' (Walker, 2007: 140).

lineage is clearly on Sinclair's mind in *Dining on Stones*, too, as he returns almost verbatim to the earlier passage in *Rodinsky's Room* to describe 'the high contrast theatre of Bill Brandt, Eugène Atget's deserted Paris with sharp-prowed buildings like transatlantic liners in dry docks' (*DOS*: 24).

In *London Orbital* Sinclair reflected upon how Paleologou's earlier show 'Cityscapes' offered a new perspective upon his familiar East London territory, 'her nightstalker's liminal meditations […] making the familiar unfamiliar' (*LO*: 104). Casually but importantly, Sinclair also suggests that Surrealism played a role in the production of these prints, too: arguing that: 'Effie looks for the risk (surreal anecdotes) but purges it from her prints, which are infinitely calm, balanced, resilient' (*LO*: 104). The production of Paleologou's images, Sinclair suggests, required an immersion in the risky everyday surrealism of a nocturnal journey across the city—'trees sculpted with artificial light. Upper-deck revellers in red buses, the revel burnt out of them' (*LO*: 104)—a risky endeavour which shapes the production of the images even as the traces of danger are 'purged' from the final prints. As Sinclair suggests in *Dining on Stones*: '[s]he was an extraordinary story teller [who] took the narrative out' (*DOS*: 8).

In *Dining on Stones* Norton/Sinclair tells us that 'the task I'd given myself was to put the fiction back into Effie's documents. To pick up the stories that she had abandoned' (*DOS*: 8). In one of the most resonant passages of the book Sinclair acts upon this self-imposed duty by tracing one of the nocturnal journeys taken by this photographer across the Hastings 'dreamscape'. Working directly from Paleologou's photographs in this passage, Sinclair uses them as a guide to draw himself along the seafront, and through the newly uncanny townscape glimpsed through the borrowed perspective of his collaborator. A contrast is established here, as the drift of the prose moves between, for example: 'Photograph: sodium lights reflected in fissure of black limestone rock' (*DOS*: 209), and '*Incident*. Drinkers (hypersensitive to the cameras) spot her. Invite her to join them, around the fire' (*DOS*: 209); 'Photograph: blue searchlights casting a pyramid shape on the rounded stern of the Cunard Court flats' (*DOS*: 209); '*Incident* […] a hunched figure, early hours of the morning, pushing a funereal contraption […] a thing sitting in it, stiff but alert. A child. An infant. A *doll*' (*DOS*: 209).

Sinclair works from Paleologou's empty, spectral seafront photographs in *Dining on Stones*. In doing so, however, he also re-populates these images: re-inserting the 'risk (surreal anecdotes)' which he sees as having been purged from them. In this re-

working of the photographer's images the nocturnal shoreline becomes a space of *encounter* for a 'community' of people for whom, for various reasons, darkness has its advantages. The seaside at night is a place of risk, certainly, but is also, as Kent puts it, a 'space [..] of possibility where anything could, or may, happen' (Kent, 2000, unpaginated). Drunks on the beach offer the unreliable, risky, companionship of a space at their fireside; the lone photographer's nightwalk intersects with that of a woman with a macabre doll in her pram, enacting her own strange domestic routine—'*[t]he doll grows*. The old woman must have a collection, rags for each of them. Routes to walk' (*DOS*: 209). A curious balance of threat and homeliness is established, as atmospheres of menace spiral back into '*Incident*[s]' of unexpected kindness, as when men follow Livia down the toilet steps of a deserted takeaway only '[t]o offer a fresh bar of carbolic soap, a clean towel' (*DOS*: 209).

The eventful nocturnal seafront, as *re-populated* by Sinclair from Paleologou's empty, sodium-lit images, becomes a space of encounter and exchange: a home, of sorts, to the underdeck community who are at the heart of *Dining on Stones*. Kent suggests that Paleologou in '*The Front* presents us with a genuine feeling of exclusion, of looking on, and in, places where we do not belong' (Kent, 2000, unpaginated). Negotiating the nocturnal seaside town though the eyes of an international collaborator to whom such topographies are genuinely unfamiliar, therefore, and to whom they do not hold the cultural trappings of a 'national imaginary', Sinclair presents us with a very different 'frame', a different mode of seeing. Sinclair borrows, collaboratively, the perspective of someone 'looking on, and in' at a locale from which, in various respects, they may be excluded. Unlike Kaporal, or the other Sinclair observers in their high windows, looking *down* upon the 'others' who wander the seafront below. Sinclair says of Paleologou's work that 'The tenderness she had for the world shocked me' (*DOS*: 8). In embracing the 'risk' of re-populating this photographer's images with the 'surreal anecdotes', and surreal encounters that have been stripped from them, he embraces that tenderness, too, and establishes, with Paleologou, a space of strange encounter in which to experience, and walk *among,* 'the communality of the underdeck'.