



Non-Linear Cinema and the Editing of Urban Space in the Fiction of Iain Sinclair

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Critical accounts of the key influences on Iain Sinclair's prose fiction, focussing on the poetics of place, situationist psychogeography, Surrealism, post-Poundian US poetry, the Beats, and the neomodernist British poetry revival, have tended to exclude a reckoning with the vital significance of cinema to his vision of London. This is surprising, given how often Sinclair's fiction re-plays scenes and echoes locations from British, European and Hollywood cinema, and how his prose abounds in references to a multitude of films. Cinema offered Sinclair a repertoire of means to recalibrate his thinking and writing about London. The year-long season of seventy films he curated in 2013–14, to mark his seventieth birthday, was 'a form of alternative autobiography', a way to indicate how much of his life had been spent talking about, dreaming, making, and writing about films. When he began the preliminary list for the season, tracing films referenced in his books by working backwards from *Ghost Milk* (2011), he had already listed more than a hundred before reaching *Dining on Stones* (2004) (70X70 5). Cinema is a dream source which energises his writing, and the techniques he learnt during his formative exposure to filmmaking, particularly methods of editing – the main focus of this essay – and which he refined over decades of writing about film, profoundly shaped his methods of assembling urban space, and his sense of narrative style and structure. A remark he makes about Patrick Hamilton also doubles, in my account, as a description of his own prose style: 'The grammar of film leaked into the novels' (*My Favourite London Devils* 201, 131).

As he observes in the *70X70* book which accompanied the year-long season, 'my discovery of London was the business of making journeys to find cinemas [...] any understanding I had of the city came from the process of searching out films' (*70X70* 120). In the early 1960s, when he first moved to London to become a filmmaker, his life was 'defined through films', and his 'sense of the geography of London was entirely constructed through cinema' (*70X70* 53). His journey to Dalston to see Joseph Losey's *The Criminal* (1960), taking the bus from Liverpool Street and up Kingsland Road to the Rio cinema, was his 'introduction to the East End of London' (*70X70* 54). The location of the cinemas, together with the sites depicted in the films, reconfigured his sense of the overlooked and obscure dimensions of the city's topography, the subterranean countercultures and the London of dark heritage which become his signature territories. Throughout his fiction and non-fiction, city spaces consistently map onto locations, scenes and images from a diverse range of films. A man appears at the far end of a street, 'like Nosferatu or Der Golem [...] casting no shadow'; at a train station, TV screens reprise the Lumiere Bros' *Arrival of a Train* (1895), as 'the train in dutiful longshot slid across the frame'; a vision of a sinking ship in Gallions Reach, with its 'perambulation of ghosts' is a 'whelk-stall Marienbad' (*Downriver* 202, 253, 286, 397). The 'romance of East London rail yards' brings to mind Robert Hamer's *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947); the panorama from a Stratford tower is echoed in the 'establishing shots in *Bronco Bullfrog*, the 1970 film by Barney Platts-Mills'; the chimney of a Brick Lane brewery, 'appears like an accusing finger in stills taken from Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out*, which was released in 1947' and shot in Haggerston Park, E2 (*Ghost Milk* 15, 23, 58). The land piracy and local government corruption in the development of Docklands under Thatcher is exposed in the gangster film *The Long Good Friday* (1979); the abandoned flour mills in Silvertown are seen through the eyes of Derek Jarman, who transformed them into 'a site for dervish dances and the orgiastic rituals of a punk apocalypse'; Chris Petit's *Radio On* (1979) captures the Westway: West London's Ballardian elevated dual carriageway, with a 'stranger's eye [...] wholly European' (*Lights Out* 61, 172, 205). Jean-Luc Godard shot parts of *British Sounds* (1969) in London: 'A union meeting in Dagenham [...] And a nude descending a Montague Road staircase'; Orson Welles, a decade later, was commissioned to make a TV programme about Chelsea Pensioners (*Hackney* 45, 320). The sound effects for 'the closing scenes of *The Third Man*, the pursuit of Harry Lime, were recorded in the sewers of the Fleet'

(*Radon Daughters* 332). A drive up the A13 resembles 'the credit sequence of *The Sopranos*' (*Dining on Stones* 63).

Sinclair's deep knowledge and passion for Hollywood and European cinema began at school, where he cultivated an obsession with the films of Bergman, Kurosawa, Dreyer and Cocteau, and which he developed as an undergraduate in Dublin, watching assiduously 'seasons of Sam Fuller, Budd Boetticher, Nicholas Ray, Anthony Mann, Douglas Sirk, Vincent Minnelli, Don Siegel' (*Lights Out* 272, 276). It culminated in a desire to move to London and become a filmmaker himself, to 'make some kind of living out of cinema' (*The Verbals* 26). Cinema brought Sinclair to London and kept him there. At the London School of Film Technique in Brixton, he learnt the practice of scriptwriting, directing and 16mm camera operation. In 1967, he directed and edited *Ah! Sunflower*, a documentary on Allen Ginsberg in London, worked on a detailed, unproduced film treatment about William Burroughs, 'The Face on the Fork', for German TV (WDR), and also wrote a film adaptation of the Anglo-Welsh poet Vernon Watkins' symbolist verse drama, *The Ballad of the Mari Llwyd* (*Lights Out* 280). A lyrical 8mm film diary, inspired by Stan Brakhage, mapped and logged his experience of communal life in Hackney; over eight years, he practiced filming in 'small, fragmentary forms' using techniques of multiple superimposition, 'very few retakes, no rehearsal, no reverse angles, edited in camera' (*The Verbals* 85). He returned to filmmaking in 1992, collaborating with Chris Petit on *The Cardinal and the Corpse* (1992), and again with Petit on *The Falconer* (1998), *Asylum* (2000) and *London Orbital* (2002). During the post-production of these experimental documentaries, he acquired an intimate working knowledge of digital non-linear editing software which, I will argue, influenced his prose fiction of this period.

The technique of film editing recurs significantly in Sinclair's accounts of his filmmaking practice, and in his sense of the relations between film technique and prose style. At the Walthamstow Technical College and School of Art, he gained a familiarity with editing machines and a technical knowledge of how 'unconnected frames would have to be edited together, much later, to achieve meaning' (*Hackney* 72). He 'spent a lot of time listening to an exiled Hollywood editor: Saul gave me plenty of good advice about cutting my own film, all the proper information about "A" and "B" rolls' (*Lights Out* 278–9). Struggling to match unsynchronised sound to the image track whilst 'editing footage of Ginsberg, in August 1967, in a cutting room in Amsterdam, I began to appreciate how image pulls away from sound' (*American Smoke* 160).

During his Dublin years, he shot some footage for the filmmaker Tom Baker ‘and also did most of the editing’ (*Lights Out* 277). The editing style of the unproduced Burroughs film would be inspired by the cut-up technique of Burroughs’s tape recording experiments, the films he made with Anthony Balch, such as *Towers Open Fire*, but also his writing: for Sinclair, Burroughs’s ‘whole approach to writing could be referenced to a kind of cinema’ (*70X70* 8, 55). The grammar of editing, its methods of construction based on audio-visual fragments, begins to define and enhance his sense of prose style. The filmmaking career which was open to him in his formative years was as a BBC ‘Third Assistant Editor’ – ‘the way I would have gone was editing’ – but he instead pulls back, absorbing his technical knowledge into his writing: ‘I got into my own territory, created my own space’ (*The Verbals* 36, 59). In a conversation with the filmmaker Gary Walkow, Sinclair asserts that ‘editing is really the process. It relates to writing’ (*70X70* 85). Years of underground filmmaking activity begins to surface in his writing, as the instinct to select and assemble audio-visual fragments is sublimated into his syntactic structures. The visual and the textual elements in his filmmaking and writing become reciprocal and self-continuous, or as he put it, ‘part of one structure of energy’ (Hedgecock 14). According to his long-term friend and collaborator, Brian Catling, ‘Sinclair would film hand-held, dashing around grabbing images in a kaleidoscopic attack. And of course it’s exactly the same in his writing’ (Hunt 43).

The influence of his technical work in film editing is evident in those passages in his writing which give explicit emphasis to cross-cutting, reverse angles and selective details in close-up. The sequence of the bombing of a London hospital in *Radon Daughters* (1994) is written in the style of a shooting script for a Hitchcockian chase sequence, and is divided and organised into shot-like visual units. It displays a detailed knowledge of the principles of classical continuity editing, the industry-standard method whereby the editor assembles scenes from the rushes, shot several times and from a variety of camera angles, focussing on maintaining spatial and temporal coherence, and ensuring that the eyeline – the angle at which the object or person is observed – matches the angle from which the character is looking. Helen is first seen on the steps of the hospital in close-up, ‘Legs, stockings, heels’ and her movement is depicted as a lateral tracking shot moving left to right: ‘Rapid tracking (L/R)’. The shot is cut with a ‘High angle (apex of pediment) down onto steps’, giving a privileged audience perspective, ‘anticipating disaster’. It then cuts to a close-up, ‘Tight on Helen’, before ‘Tracking

back'; long shots are intercut with close-ups to generate tension between Helen's perspective, and the point of view of her pursuer, O'Hagan: 'Reverse angle. Long shot', then 'BCU: her lips' (a screenplay abbreviation for Big Close-Up), then 'BCU: O'Hagan. Expressionless'. Helen 'walks out of shot, revealing O'Hagan', who keeps his distance as he trails behind her, and the scene is made vivid with expressionist noir details: 'Puddles and shadows in alleyway', 'Clouds in windows', 'Rubbish bins overturned' as she 'slips, falls, picks herself up' (373), followed by 'Panic. Blackout. Music' (*Radon Daughters* 373–4).

The repetition of shots in high angle and close-up with minor variations, accelerating and shortening the length of each shot to enhance tension, is a Hitchcockian method; the cutting between the holdall which contains the bomb, and the 'digital clock on the desk', alludes to the scene in Hitchcock's *Sabotage* – an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (Conrad's novel haunts *Radon Daughters*) – specifically, the scene which cross-cuts between the boy carrying a bomb, and images of various clocks, the shots accelerating in short, rapid cuts before the bomb explodes (*Radon Daughters* 375).

Discrete fragments, disjointed in themselves, are cut together into a rhythmical sequence, and a form of cross-cutting and parallel editing guides the attention of the reader to the particular visual details of a clear line of developing action. As Sonny Jacques, the film director in *Downriver*, puts it, 'editing is the really constructive stage' (*Downriver* 120). The scene's construction overtly declares the structural importance of the grammar of film editing, as the presence of an authorial editor figure organizes the sequence into a series of shot-like units of varying length, repeating and accelerating at the level of word, phrase and sentence. Here, a characteristic element of Sinclair's prose style – the accumulation of abrupt cell-like units, the reduced connective phrases – explicitly draws on methods of filmic editing. Critics such as Simon Perrill, who notes Sinclair's 'dislike of the finite subordinate clause' (Perrill 332), have often characterised the staccato quality of his prose in relation to the paratactic methods of modernist poetics. I would argue that it is a prose style which also bears the influence of the structural procedures of cinematic montage, a view which is reinforced by the numerous references to Soviet film throughout his writing. A walk along a stretch of Commercial Road – 'hooded lurkers in doorways, opium dens out of Sax Rohmer, needles underfoot, wrecked bus shelters, burnt-out cars' – is envisioned as 'a tracking shot from one of the Soviet realists, a camera train, Dziga Vertov: sailors' dormitories, reading rooms, padlocked

swimming pools (with an Eisenstein montage of culture hero statues, cranes, demolition balls, high-contrast clouds)' (*Dining on Stones* 118). In *Downriver*, Sonny Jacques exclaims:

Dziga Vertov! Kino-Eye! Montage is the true engine of the lyric. We'll plunder those reservoirs of unconscious aspiration. Take whatever we are given, and cut/cut/cut to the heartbeat, to the rhythms of the breath: engines, wheels, statues falling, racing clouds, the quaking towers of the city. Futurists of a New Reality! (*Downriver* 325)

In *Ghost Milk*: 'Footage, as Pudovkin and the early theorists of film editing knew, can be organized to create guilt by association' (*Ghost Milk* 107). Montage was the principal technique which defined the cinema of Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Dziga Vertov. For Eisenstein, 'the essence of cinema does not lie in the images, but in the relation between the images' (quoted in Aumont 146), in the dissonance, juxtaposition and collision of individual fragments. This assemblage of images – a formal system which is distinct from the construction of plot – generates a structure of recurring motifs, graphic patterns in dynamic conflict, and rhythmic variations determined by the length of individual shots (Eisenstein 242). It is a method which echoes the scenic disintegration, the reduction of narrative to an accretion of visual fragments in Sinclair's novels. In *Dining on Stones*, a scene where a car is stacked with young men – 'Fat, white-wall tyres: the nearside front, detumescent. Windows like gun-ports [...] Shouldershuffling, nudging [...] No sign of the mechanic. Peep through dirty window, return to base' – is a 'soap opera badly mangled in an editing suit. Vital plot lines have been lost or suppressed' (*Dining on Stones* 18-19). Elsewhere in *Dining on Stones*, the protagonist Norton observes 'burning chimneys of the Esso oil refineries at Purfleet' and 'the spontaneous combustions of the landfill site on Rainham Marshes'; in the unspooling film of his memory, this vision of a night voyage on the Thames re-emerges as a montage in superimposition, 'lapped over this sunlit room in Earls Court: arbitrary juxtapositions'. It is a vision or fantasy of 'conspiracies, coincidences, seams, going up in smoke', montage juxtapositions of place in the absence of narrative shape: 'stories lost [...] stories that got away' (*Dining on Stones* 27).

For Sinclair, London is 'a carousel of disorientating jumpcuts' (*Ghost Milk* 303). Discrete visual fragments, a fractured network of sidestreets, crossroads, tunnels, industrial parks, landfill sites, scrapyards, are

assembled as though in an editing suite, As Richard Koeck, argues, ‘Like films, architecture and entire cities can have linear, non-linear and multi-narrative qualities [...] Our movements through urban space influence the way in which that space is “edited”’ (Koeck 210). The juxtaposition of shifting patterns and sudden unexpected perceptions in Sinclair’s excursions through the city form a vision of urban space based on the principles of discontinuous, non-linear montage. It is a mode of perception which is distinct from the unedited reality as revealed through a car windscreen: ‘no highlights, no special moments: a discreet tyranny of “now”’ (*Lights Out* 90). Whereas the film of *London Orbital*, made in collaboration with Chris Petit, recorded their drives around the motorway loop of the M25 – as Petit’s voiceover puts it, ‘after several weeks of attempted cutting the M25 firmly resists editing’ – the book is based on a series of walks, and an entirely different sense of spatial organization, involving the juxtaposition of fragments – ‘Junction 21 of the M25, the Siebel building in Egham, Hawksmoor’s gravestone in Shenley’ – and their re-assembly into new configurations (*London Orbital* 263). The act of walking through the city is also an act of re-editing its topography. As he circumnavigates his chosen territories, forgotten routes, transitional landscapes, neglected peripheral zones, non-places emerge like discarded rushes, abandoned footage allowing new possibilities to emerge. These off-cuts of the city present a counter-narrative, a form of resistance to the standard heritage version of London, a secret history overlooked by the dominant culture of consumption.

According to Marc Augé, who coined the term, non-places are ‘geometric’ and can be mapped in terms of basic spatial forms such as ‘the line, the intersection of lines, and the point of intersection’ which correspond to ‘routes, axes or paths [...] to crossroads and open spaces’ (Augé 57). This vocabulary echoes the language of film editing, which is also concerned with spatial forms, intersecting lines and points of intersection. In *The Last London* (2018), Sinclair’s remembers the walk which traced the lines of intersection between the six Hawksmoor churches:

the impression of the obelisk of St Luke’s, Old Street, stayed with me until I reached Christ Church, Spitalfields, a structure displacing its own volume in my reverie of London. There was a slow cinematic dissolve, moving as I moved. Christ Church began to fade as I passed Martin’s house in Cannon Street Road and saw the tower of St George-in-the-East above the Crown and Dolphin pub. St George

was imprinted until I walked through the gates of St Anne's in Limehouse (*The Last London* 229).

The 'slow cinematic dissolve' signals a particular style of transition in editing from one image to another. The most frequent edit in film is a 'hard cut', or a cut from one image to another with no transition. A dissolve involves a gradual transition between two images, where the first image fades out as the next image fades in. In terms of the city's topography, a dissolve's smooth transition would suggest a relation, a possible commonality or likeness between one space and the next, as distinct from a hard cut, which emphasizes the distinctness of one space from the next. What is unexpected in Sinclair's account is the use of a dissolve between the churches, instead of a hard cut to emphasise their lack of continuity with the surrounding urban spaces. The dissolve erases the space between the churches; it draws attention to the configuration between the churches, and in doing so summons Sinclair's influential occult map in *Lud Heat* (1975): 'A triangle is formed between Christ Church, St George in the East and St Anne, Limehouse [...] St George, Bloomsbury and St Alfrege, Greenwich, make up the major pentacle-star' (*Lud Heat* 17). These geometric patterns contain and generate a force field of malign energy which exerted an evil influence over some of the crimes committed within the vicinity of the churches, such as the Ratcliffe Highway killings of 1811, and the Ripper murders of 1888. The boundaries of this force field shape Sinclair's walk between the churches, producing an 'occulted fiction of place, in the same way that still frames, dragged through the teeth of a projector, give an illusion of movement, reality' (*Lud Heat* 17). The stillness of the churches as 'fixed points, outside time' erases the movement between them, emphasizing the formal pattern of geometry uncovered in a series of 'multiple superimpositions' (*Lud Heat* 228, 7), another term derived from film editing, where two or more shots are placed over each other so that each image is visible simultaneously.

Sinclair's notion of the edited city involves the juxtapositions of units of space, but it also employs methods of temporal sequencing and multiple superimpositions of distinct yet simultaneous time zones. In *White Chapell*, *Scarlet Tracings*, history plays out in the cross-cutting and dissolves between three simultaneous time-lines: the book-dealers' quest to find a rare edition of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* in the 1980s; Sinclair and Joblard's obsessive investigation into the identity of Jack the Ripper in the 1970s; and the Victorian pastiche concerning various Ripper suspects in the 1880s. The effect generates a structure, as Robert

Sheppard puts it, of a 'multiverse of enactments, parallel series, repetitions and re-enactments' (Sheppard 43); connections echo and re-echo across multiple time-zones which unfold simultaneously, in a method which suggests the influence of the modernist cinema of Sinclair's formative years. In his excursions through and writing about London, Sinclair's city montage is interlaced with the non-linear cutting and time-shifts in the cinema of Alain Resnais, Nicholas Roeg and Michaelangelo Antonioni.

The repeated references to Alain Resnais's and Robbe-Grillet's 1962 film *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*) throughout Sinclair's work – 'conversations stop and start at random, leap backwards and forwards like *Last Year at Marienbad*' (*Lights Out* 275); 'the technique was diluted Resnais (with Delphine Seyrig, escaped from *Marienbad*, to take a cameo part)' (*Crash* 29) – reinforces the significance of modernist serial editing on his own narrative methods. The film, one of the key works of the *nouvelle vague*, revolutionised the possibilities of discontinuous, non-linear montage, rejecting the seamlessness of a structure of cause-and-effect, and eliminating the distinctions between the tenses and time zones in which narrative situations occur. The film's structure, created through its method of editing, continuously asserts a series of alternative scenarios, rehearsed and re-played, where possible compositions unfold without becoming fixed into a single, coherent sequence. It is a method of cutting based on principles of montage and the rediscovery of Eisenstein by the *nouvelle vague*, and which in turn influenced the cubist time-shifts of the modernist films, greatly admired by Sinclair, of Nicholas Roeg, Joseph Losey, Antonioni. In an account of the influence of Resnais on Joseph Losey's *Accident* (1967), Sinclair's discussion of the films' 'Cubist approach, oblique slivers of evidence reassembled, forward flashes, dialogue and effects used as part of a compositional field, [which] gives some edge to a linear narrative' (*Crash* 29) could also double as an account of the associative montage and time-shifts in his own open-field narrative fictions. Imagining Ballard's *Crash* directed by Nicholas Roeg – 'The *Crash* of the *Don't Look Now* era [...] was an attractive prospect' – he envisions 'London as a fragmented, time-shifting psychogeography' (*Crash* 27).

In *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1997), Norton, a prisoner of London, travels back and forth through time, a spectral camera-eye witnessing the violent events of London's past. Cutting between the murders of Christopher Marlowe in Deptford in 1593, and Jack 'the Hat' McVitie in Stoke Newington in 1967, Norton the 'time surfer' becomes an editor,

'breaking time into a stutter of single frames' and then re-arranging them into a new narrative shape 'that grew, developed, branched out in fractal abundance'. Witnessing Marlowe's murder in 'frozen longshot', in 'close-ups, wide shots', Norton 'sees the way it cuts'. He rehearses events in his mind, re-narrates and revises them, 'edit[s] them': he is 'Author as editor' (*Slow Chocolate Autopsy* 9, 11, 109, 11, 16, 106). The book is part graphic novel, and is accompanied by Dave McKean's montage-like illustrations; Sinclair makes reference to their collaboration within the text, and the dual function of text and image as it is assembled together: 'He ironed out the pages McKean had sent him with the ball of his fist, shuffled the order, but could make no sense of them. "Unedited city"' (*Slow Chocolate Autopsy* 8). In Julian Wolfreys's account of one of the images, the title page to chapter two, McKean's montage overlays a range of East End histories in an 'impossible simultaneity' with 'multiple intertextual and discursive resonances', citing 'film and topography, and from there to other discourses and narratives (myth, architecture, paganism, freemasonry)' (Wolfreys). The image precedes the chapter of the book which reworks the murder of Jack 'The Hat' McVitie by the Lambrianou brothers, associates of the Krays; it juxtaposes a still from John Mackenzie's *The Long Good Friday* (1979), the East End gangland film often referenced by Sinclair, and an 1880s map of Whitechapel, site of Hawksmoor's Christ Church, Spitalfields and the Ripper murders. These multiple images serve as the graphic equivalent of the simultaneous overlaying of East End history, mythology, and cinema in Sinclair's prose, where 'the photographs, the film frames, tell their own story. Voyeurism. Rituals of programmed violence. The memory spools unravelling at both ends of the Lea Bridge Road: the Hitchcock pub and the London Orphan Asylum' (*Slow Chocolate Autopsy* 57).

The continual recurrence of photographs and film stills in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*, and their re-arrangement into new narrative structures, asserts the importance of single frames to Sinclair's compositional method. Accounts he has given of his process outline the vital significance of photography: 'a major resource for memory, structure [...] which saves me from writing down notes. I'd rather have the images' (*The Verbals* 83). Each walk through London involves taking hundreds of photographs, which are re-arranged retrospectively and combined in new and unexpected ways to tell a story, prior to the transcription of those images into words: 'walks, photographs—then at some later date, a book' (*London Orbital* 208). The writing is to a large extent based on the editing of the photographs which document the excursion. For Sinclair, there is

'already a powerful narrative element in the image. Each frame provokes the next, implies movement' (*Lights Out* 274). This method of selecting, organising and re-editing a series of still images resonates throughout his fiction. In *Downriver*, Bobby and Joblard attempt to arrange the twelve Conradian postcards in the opening chapter 'into a coherent tale', a narrative fiction 'that would animate these static images'. As Robert Hampson notes, the twelve images serve as 'minaturised, microcosmic versions of the twelve tales of *Downriver*' (Hampson 110). In *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*, Norton asserts: 'stick any two postcards on a wall and you've got a narrative' (*Slow Chocolate Autopsy* 88); similarly, when the narrator in *Landor's Tower* sees photographs 'laid out on the table', he remarks: 'You could pick them up in any order and invent a narrative' (*Landor's Tower* 158).

The process of assembling photographs in order to animate them into a narrative sequence recalls a key moment in Michaelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), a film to which Sinclair often alludes in both his fiction and non-fiction: 'the park near Charlton Athletic football ground from *Blow-Up*' (*Lights Out* 273); 'Maryon Park from Antonioni's *Blow-Up*' (*Hackney* 159); 'The deserted tennis courts, amphitheatre, severely angled steps cut into a gentle gradient. She recognized the set at once. Antonioni's *Blow-Up*' (*Radon Daughters* 377). In the film, set in swinging London in the 1960s, David Hemmings plays a photographer modelled on David Bailey. After wandering into Maryon Park, he takes some photographs of a couple; the woman rushes over to demand the roll of film, and appears again at his studio insisting he hand the film over to her. He gives her a different roll of film, and driven by curiosity about the woman's persistence, enlarges the photos from the park. In one of the blown-up photos, he thinks he can see a figure in the bushes pointing a gun. He arranges and re-arranges the images on his wall until he starts to believe he may have witnessed a murder. Returning to the park at night, he sees the body of the man, but he does not have his camera with him and when he returns again later the body is gone and the prints in his studio have been stolen.

The film maintains an uncertainty as to whether the murder really did happen, by implying that the figure holding a gun could be a mark on the negative, and that the photographer could possibly have only imagined seeing the body in the park. This ambiguity is reinforced during the central scene in the studio when he arranges the photos on his wall. He constructs a narrative by editing and re-editing the still images together until they form a sequence: long shots of the couple embracing

are followed by the enlarged closer shot of the woman looking over his shoulder towards the bushes, then the close up enlargement of the hand holding the gun, followed by another shot of the woman anxiously looking in that direction. The photos are re-ordered until he establishes apparent spatial and temporal continuity, and a clear eyeline match between the direction of the woman's gaze and the angle of the image of the gun. Once the photos have been cut together, the sequence then plays out as a series of images – long shots, close-ups, eyeline matches – over the sound of the trees from the sequence in the park, suggesting a flashback to the murder scene; yet the way in which the scene is constructed is based on the methods of continuity editing, the chief method of narrative fiction in cinema, so it is also implied that the sequence is based on an illusion of spatial construction, and that he has imagined the narrative by editing together images to fit the Hitchcockian murder plot in his head.

In *Landor's Tower* (2001), a Hitchcockian murder plot which may or may not have happened is revealed in a series of photographs 'laid out on the table like tarot cards', assembled together to 'invent a narrative' (*Landor's Tower* 158). While book-dealers search for rare editions at Hay-on-Wye, and a researcher investigates unexplained deaths at the secret services centre in Cheltenham, the narrator, commissioned to write a book on Walter Savage Landor's proposed utopian community at Llanthony Priory in Wales, develops an obsession with the noirish figure Prudence Pelham. Prudence could be an escapee from the asylum, but she is also at least partly imaginary, a composite of film scenes, a reincarnation of the love-obsession of the poet and artist David Jones modelled on Madeleine, the character Kim Novak plays in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Prudence is 'a wraith: Alfred Hitchcock remade as James Stewart, the thin man who got out; remade as Kim Novak, remade again' (*Landor's Tower* 104). Scenes from *Vertigo*, as for instance when Scottie (James Stewart) follows Madeleine as she visits the grave of Carlotta Valdes, are re-enacted as film stills:

The sight of her, half-turned, stooping to read inscriptions on the erased stone slabs, was something I couldn't process. A mortality Polaroid [...] I'd freeze a single frame: Prudence in the bookshop, the blue flicker of a paraffin lamp. Face in shadow. Leaning, bored or tired or ill, one hand in the pocket of her jeans; huddled in the black tarpaulin coat. (*Landor's Tower* 67)

Interviewed by the police after her apparent murder, the narrator is shown a series of photographs: 'A figure lying in shallow water. Marks in the sand. A face, distorted by clingfilm, shocked by the explosion of the bulb. Sections of the body: the angle of the leg. Handcuffed wrists. A decorative anklet. A naked foot and a foot in a flimsy sandal.' The photographs are, on the one hand, 'the only evidence of an exterior world'; yet they are also 'photographs of what I'd dreamt', and apparently deliberately 'overlit and harsh [...] of that school where the artist shoots herself in a variety of film noir poses', suggesting a fictional construct based on an imagination warped by too many film noirs. The order of the photographs indicates a narrative sequence, though the narrator implies that an alternative narrative could be created if the images were assembled differently: 'you could pick them up in any order and invent a narrative' (*Landor's Tower* 158). Denying that he recognizes the woman as Prudence, the police then show him a freeze frame on a video tape in which he and Prudence are visible; here, Sinclair refers to the 'Avid', the non-linear film and video editing software application which he, Petit and Emma Matthews used to edit their experimental documentaries: 'The technicians had been playing with their Avid' (*Landor's Tower* 162). After her apparent death, Prudence re-appears later in the novel, 'another superimposition, another layer to the dream', and again, standing in the middle of the road, 'arms aloft, waving us down', an allusion to Robert Aldrich's 1955 late noir *Kiss Me Deadly*, in a 'rhythmic sequence cut between squealing tyres' and 'headlights sweeping out of blind curves'. Her murder may itself have been a fictional invention of the narrator; as distinctions vanish between 'film and dream, fiction and the enactment of unrepressed mental playlets', he holds onto details of cutting patterns, close ups, finding himself 'rerunning, re-editing' sequences in his mind as though in a 'borrowed editing suite' (*Landor's Tower* 185, 291, 237, 261, 51).

This layering of sequences with minor variations, re-edited to generate alternative narratives without finalising a single timeline – crystallized in the image of the technicians 'playing with their Avid' – asserts the influence of Sinclair's detailed work with non-linear editing software in his collaborations with Chris Petit on *The Falconer* (1998) and *Asylum* (2000). He recalls the 'lengthy period in the editing suite' (*70X70* 43) with Petit and Emma Matthews, and in a discussion with Marc Karlin reveals the sense of 'enormous possibility of making the film in the editing' which this software enabled, where 'you can really work on the image, on the text of the image, on the quality of it' (*Hackney* 472). Sinclair

had spoken of his frustration with editing on film in his earlier years, where 'if you need to change the order, you had to undo everything', in contrast to digital editing, where footage could be inserted, altered, revised with great ease, which for Sinclair 'opened up [...] for the first time ever' the possibilities of 'multi-textured' film narrative (70X70 136). By the mid-1990s, digital non-linear systems such as Avid were gradually replacing the Moviolas and Steenbecks, which had been industry standard up to that point, effectively allowing for an infinitely greater degree of flexibility. On non-linear editing software, including Avid and Apple's Final Cut Pro, the digital timeline could allow for an unlimited number of simultaneously composited video tracks, or layers. The timeline is 'non-destructive': unlike with celluloid, the original content is not modified in the course of editing (Weynand 25). The final sequence is a series of digital files which can be played back without affecting either the original footage or the digitised source files. Each layer remains distinct and indestructible in the editing process; each scene or take could play out in simultaneity with layers above and below, without ever being displaced, and could function as rehearsal or re-enactment of a narrative event in the past, or the future. As Sinclair described the process: 'You could endlessly interrogate the material you had with this new technique. Nothing was fixed. You could revise' (70X70 136). This excitement with non-linear editing procedures also enhanced and refined the vision of a London of fractured time-shifts and topographical jump cuts in his prose fiction.

Sinclair's detailed work with non-linear editing provided him with a toolbox to shape the narrative intricacies of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*, *Landor's Tower* and also *Dining on Stones* (2004). This novel concerns the protagonist Norton, who is working on a book based on his expeditions up the A13, the major road which runs from Central London through Tilbury and on to Southend' – from 'Aldgate to the sea; through memory, mess, corruption, dying industries, political scams, satellite shopping cities buried in chalk quarries, Defoe, Stoker, Conrad' – and Norton's doppelganger, who seems intent on stealing his projects and absorbing his identity: 'Another writer, with my name, my face, was trailing me; stealing my research and peddling it as documentary truth, a short film here, an essay there' (*Dining on Stones* 284, 282). Norton is split into two separate figures, both versions of Sinclair's persona – Andy, the Hackney documentarian and 'urban topographer', and A. M. Norton, the 'fabulist' (*Dining on Stones* 374) – and many of the novel's sections had already been published elsewhere under Sinclair's name. In addition to

the doppelganger, a second figure, Marina Fountain, is also impersonating Norton: 'Her exaggerated prose, its shotgun sarcasm, jump-cuts, psychotic syntax, was an offensive parody of a manner of composition I'd left behind' (*Dining on Stones* 357, 167). The section titled 'Grays', attributed in the novel to Marina Fountain, duplicates Sinclair's piece 'In Train for the Estuary' (*White Goods* 57–75).

Real and fictional events loop and cross-link, and versions of earlier non-fiction texts double up as revised texts by fictional counterparts, alternative selves co-existing on the same timeline. The novel's layering of metatextual elements, and continual reference to its own methods of composition, is couched in the language of non-linear editing. As Norton tries to recall the narrative events for his A13 novel, which double as the plot for *Dining on Stones* – 'a drift through Whitechapel', 'Sebald-influenced meditation on Conrad', mini-climaxes at 'Travelodge and Beckton Alp', the 'big finish at the ibis hotel, West Thurrock' – he concludes that to order them in this way would be 'predictable, linear, boring'. By re-editing the narrative schema, he might anticipate and stay ahead of the other Norton's attempt at stealing his work: 'I would use insights gained from the Pevensey women, the Bergman films, and rewind the tape: travel back down one of my spiked narrative's tributaries. Road as river.' (*Dining of Stones* 343). Characters and situations from a 'deleted narrative could be given a second chance, revived'. The vision of the A13 as 'multilayered', a 'composite landscape (leading to composite time)' is modelled on a non-linear timeline, able to accommodate multiple events simultaneously without ever erasing them, allowing them to be revisited and re-edited at any moment (*Dining on Stones* 351).

Non-linear editing extends the experiments and procedures of earlier analogue modernist methods. The re-enactments and time-shifts in *Dining on Stones* signal a lineage between contemporary digital methods and the associative montage of an earlier generation, exemplified for Sinclair in the films of Nicholas Roeg. The restoration of a medieval wall painting prompts a discussion between Norton and his companion Track about Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973): 'the restoration, collapsing cradle, the scaffolding: the photograph that bleeds. Sutherland's eye, magnifying glass, contact sheet [...] drowned child in a red coat' (*Dining on Stones* 193). The sentence here mimics the associative montage in Roeg's film, which is structured around recurring scenes and motifs from simultaneous time-zones, such as the red coat worn both by the drowned child and the murderous doppelganger figure at the end, seen as though by premonition in the bleeding photograph.

Norton then re-edits the scene – ‘this dialogue between Norton and Track [...] never happened’ – and wonders whether to conclude it with a ‘Clean cut or lap dissolve’ (*Dining on Stones* 194).

Another of Roeg’s films, *Performance* (1970), co-directed with Donald Cammell, serves as a key context of structure for the narrative procedures, the duplication of character, text and event, and the non-linear, multi-narrative qualities of urban space in *Dining on Stones*. A further reprint of Sinclair’s earlier material involves the ‘search for the journals (confessions) of a man called David Litvinoff, who had been dialogue coach & technical adviser on the film *Performance*’ (*Dining on Stones* 91), fulfilling Sinclair’s long-held intention, expressed in *Lights Out for the Territory* and elsewhere, to develop a project about Litvinoff, ‘the much mythologised lowlife conduit for the Nicolas Roeg/Donald Cammell film’ (*Lights Out* 18). *Performance*, which appears throughout Sinclair’s writing – in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*, Norton is ‘The Donald Cammell to Chris Petit’s Nicolas Roeg’ (*Slow Chocolate Autopsy* 153) – becomes in *Dining on Stones* a complex point of reference which interanimates the book’s various doublings, splittings and associative cross-links.

In the film, James Fox plays Chas, a brutal East End gangster on the run from his mob boss for murdering a rival, who finds shelter in a secluded house occupied by Turner (Mick Jagger), a ‘wrecked rock star hiding out in Powis Square’ (*Lights Out* 165), living in a ménage à trois with two women, Pherber (Anita Pallenberg) and Lucy (Michèle Breton). Chas prides himself on the performance of masculinity through violence; after he enters Turner’s house, he is given hallucinogenic drugs and he merges with the feminised, sexually liberated Turner, as they absorb each other’s identities to escape from their respective psychic dead-ends. The merging of identities in *Performance*, echoed also in the doubling of Roeg and Cammell as co-directors, is mirrored in the psychic splitting of the two Nortons and Marina Fountain’s duplication of ‘Grays’, a crime story structured around a doubling which occurs when the murder victim merges with the identity of his killer. The subplot in *Dining on Stones* concerned with the quest for Litvinoff’s journals foregrounds his crucial role in introducing James Fox to the authentic world of East End villainy: ‘the Becket in the Old Kent Road. Dives in the Elephant and Castle. Whitechapel, Bermondsey, Deptford, Dartford, Krays, Richardsons’ (*Dining on Stones* 231). Fox was well known for playing aristocrats; under the guidance of Litvinoff, he was able to immerse himself in the criminal underworld. Sinclair’s emphasis on his transformation – ‘I think of the posh kid - Harrow? James Fox, getting his mouth round David Litvinoff’s

dialogue' (*Dining on Stones* 231) – deepens the notion, which resonates throughout *Dining on Stones*, of imitation and appropriation, and of London as a series of jarringly contrary units of space.

It is the film's editing and deployment of associative montage which articulates and expresses notions of merged identities and of London's composite landscapes. As Colin MacCabe points out in his account of the film's post-production, the 'extraordinarily complex editing style' (MacCabe 57) was the end result of two different periods of a troubled production. The first period of editing in London, immediately after the shoot, was met with strong opposition by Warner Bros. because their star, Mick Jagger, did not appear for the first half; when the editing was re-located to Los Angeles, Cammell teamed up with Frank Mazzola, an editor of the generation 'transfixed by European cinema of the 60s and particularly the French New Wave' (MacCabe 58), and the film's associative montage began to take shape. Cammell and Mazzola discussed using Burroughs's cut-up techniques, a key influence also for Sinclair, and the final cut of the film is informed by Burroughs as a point of reference – Pherber suggests they call 'Dr Burroughs' to give [Chas] a shot', Jagger mentions 'The Soft Machine' when he performs the song 'Memo from Turner' – and also in terms of his cut-ups, where 'the aim of the procedure was to discover connections and parallels' between characters, events and landscapes (MacCabe 59).

Shots of Jagger spray painting a wall, satisfying the studios' demands to include him in the first half of the film, are rapidly intercut with red paint being splashed on a wall in Chas's flat, drawing elliptical parallels between the two characters before they meet, and cross-cutting between Turner's bohemian house in Powis Square and Chas's East End flat before he kills a rival. As in *Dining on Stones*, psychic splitting is amplified and extended in the merging and doubling of place, leading to a notion of 'composite landscape (leading to composite time)' (*Dining on Stones* 351). Two parallel journeys overlap in Sinclair's novel, one on the A13, the other in the Peruvian jungle, generating 'a shifting landscape of equivalents' (*Dining on Stones* 29); in *Performance*, the collisions between the world of East End crime, Chelsea bohemians and the establishment ruling class are expressed in cross-cutting between parallel landscapes—the Thomas a Beckett pub on the Old Kent Road with the the Pheasantry on King's Road, the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington with the top floor of a Chinese restaurant in Soho – in order to make explicit a series of equivalences. The scene where Chas violently intimidates a mini-cab firm and strip club is meticulously cross-cut with a scene in a courtroom where

lawyers defend the apparently corrupt merging of two businesses, implying an ethical common ground between the bourgeois world of business and finance and the low-life world of East End crime. Chas' speech about the conduct of business is intercut mid-sentence with the speech of the lawyer, presenting it as an act of impersonation, pre-echoing his more detailed and complete impersonation of Turner.

In the second half of the film, complex editing patterns between Turner and Chas – for instance, when Chas looks at a ceiling mirror to see Turner's reflection, or later, when their faces are superimposed onto one another – invite comparison with the doubling and impersonation, the 'echopraxis' in *Dining in Stones*, when the two Nortons meet in a hotel (*Dining on Stones* 192). They see each other's reflection in a bathroom mirror, before one pulls the other through the mirror into an alternative reality; spatial and temporal continuity is shattered, in a manner which also recalls the closing shot of *Performance*. When Chas shoots Turner, the camera follows the path of the bullet as it emerges through his head and outside the house; the figure who leaves the house and steps into the car is apparently Chas, but as the car pulls away, it is Mick Jagger's face that we see looking out of the window. The film's superpositioning of overlapping spaces, characters and time frames, its cross-links between apparently jarring and incompatible worlds, directly echoes the non-linear compositional fields, the forward flashes and cubist time-shifts, the merging of psychic space and topography in *Dining on Stones*. It was a source of deep inspiration for Sinclair's vision of 'London as a fragmented, time-shifting psychogeography' (*Crash* 27).

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