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## ***Giving an Account of Oneself. Talk About That in 5516 words***

**Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**

"I do not see it as a second world, it is part of ours... I mainly make videos, using computer-generated technologies. They speak to the structure and to the way images are made contemporaneously; about quite fundamental aspects of human experience of love, or death or sex or relations generally... I always had a problem with pointing a camera at someone, whereas generating an image in a computer, there's no victim. The figures in the videos are surrogates, stand-ins for real people. Because they're not real, and it's me that's performing them, I feel I can do more to them, treat them worse... The CG world is a very inhospitable place. There's pleasure in making them, but I'm not a creature that lives in a cupboard. The videos are demanding, solicit and beg for recognition. I want people to be totally immersed, not like in a cinema where you forget yourself, but in that way that you're constantly reminded of yourself."<sup>i</sup> *Ed Atkins*

The book you hold in your hands is an artist's book, in so far as the bulk of its pages have been constructed by the artist as a collage of imagery, text and graphic elements, gleaned from the worlds of his video works from the last four years and their source material. You will find, for example, an image of the *Barberini Faun*, the Hellenistic marble sculpture of a drunken and sleeping satyr in the Glyptothek in Munich. For centuries after it had been found in a ditch in Rome, the sculpture was in the collection of the Barberini family. After numerous attempts to acquire it over the years, Ludwig of Bavaria finally bought it in 1814 and it was sent to Germany five years later. The reclining figure, his legs wide open, unabashedly sexual, exhibits a chipped off, flaccid penis, and still today inspires marvel at an oxymoronic paradox: how could something so carefully and intentionally crafted, so coldly marble and still, represent a state of being so uncertain and unconscious – whether sleeping, drunk, or possibly even dead? Atkins' own contemporary version of the *Barberini Faun*, carefully crafted into three variations, is the desperately lonely character in *Ribbons* (2014), on view in this exhibition today, a digital surrogate who drinks himself to sleep in bars in search of love, yet finds only holes in the wall through which to stuff his nose or fingers or dick.<sup>ii</sup>

Another image that comes up in this book shows a pair of forearms and hands in a holding position, as if supporting an invisible soccer ball or cradling someone's head in one's lap. This image actually refers to an erotic and murderous drawing by Pierre Klossowski of a young man suffocating an invalid titled *Suprême vision de frère Damien*. Klossowski's essay on Friedrich Nietzsche is included in Atkins' reading list published on page 236 of this book. This reading list, although not an "artwork" in the standard sense, forms part of our exhibition. We purchased all the books he recommended for the library of the Castello di Rivoli, and there they will remain, gathered together according to the "provenance principle" of archives, for future readers and passers-by to come. In

his long essay, Klossowski gives an artist's account of Nietzsche's intensity, depression, Dionysiac euphoria, will to life and circular view of an "eternal return" and repetition of life. Nietzsche is seen as a *character* struggling with incoherence and enclosure, with the notion of primordial impulse and of restituting "to *the very act of thinking* the virtue of resistance to any 'conceptualization'."<sup>iii</sup> The image of the forearms and hands in a holding position appears in the single-channel video *Happy Birthday!!!* (2014),<sup>iv</sup> which starts with a still HD (high-definition) image of a stereotypically handsome man in the prime of his life, with the date 2016 written on his forehead in a distorted script that both suggests a tattoo yet also clearly makes digital techniques manifest.

*Happy Birthday!!!* is such a trite expression, usually spoken as a mere formality and with no thought about what lurks beneath the reference to our birth – our inexorable mortality chronicled by the years of our life. The triteness of the words "happy birthday," compared to the immense dimension of life to which it refers, recalls a similar contrast in the 1971 poem by Gilbert Sorrentino *The Morning Roundup*, which appears as an epigraph to this book, in the voiceover of the video work *Warm, Warm, Warm Spring Mouths*, as well as in the live performance *Synonyms: One or Two Noise-making Rifts*, in which Atkins rehearses the poem and its impossible, recuperative attempt over and over again:

I don't want to hear any news on the radio  
about the weather on the weekend. Talk about that.

Once upon a time  
a couple of people were alive  
who were friends of mine.

The weathers, the weathers they lived in!  
Christ, the sun on those Saturdays.<sup>v</sup>

In the mad and histrionic collage of references to dates that make up *Happy Birthday!!!*, those of his father (1950–2009) come up, as do other dates much less connectable to Atkins' real life, like 1872. The work refers to memory time and to moments in time and their repetition, to the loss of those moments, to the pain in that loss, and to the ways in which we say goodbye to people over and over again as we internalize them, to the way that an embrace of another person could be an embrace of ourselves. The flow of images that make up the video is accompanied by Atkins' own voice speaking a first-person narrative about a now that is eternally returning: "Every Sunday, every Sunday in 1951... it's 1872... I remember, I remember... this time next year."

Now is the Fall of 2016, and the book you hold was made over the last six months on the occasion of Atkins' exhibition at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea and Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo. Now is one year after the artist's double presentation of his video *Hisser* on two floors of a run-down wooden building that had until recently been a hospice for the sick. Located on Büyükada Island on the Bosphorus, an island where subjects were exiled from antiquity, the house had originally belonged to a Greek family – a community who had lived in the area for thousands of years, but who, like the Armenians, were brutally exiled from Turkey in the first part of the twentieth century. The video was inspired by a true story of a man in Florida who died in his sleep when his house slid into a sinkhole. In twenty minutes, it describes a series of vignettes in the final stages of the male character's life at night in his bedroom, prior to an earthquake and a sinkhole that swallows him and the entire room up into a final ecstatic release (death? orgasm?) represented as an

abstract dive into water. At first dreaming and then awake and sleepless, he looks at Rorschach stains, then masturbates to the postcard of Walter Sickert's painting *Ennui* (1914) and another of the *Barberini Faun*. This is the quietest and most narrative of Atkins' recent works and, except for the billowing of curtains in the wind, nothing much seems to happen before the cataclysmic end. The subject is lonely, in a state of waiting and exile from active life.

And now is six months after the premiere of the artist's video installation *Safe Conduct* in a white-cube space of the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen. In its neutrality, the space in Copenhagen was somewhat reminiscent of an airport – as are all museum white cubes – thus abetting the core subject matter for the video, which plays to the music of Ravel's *Bolero* from a triad of video walls reminiscent of those you might find streaming news broadcasts in a Terminal. The airport is a contemporary space of "safe" passage – yet also of fear, where travelers today must willingly subject themselves to (and are subjugated by) scans, searches, and controls in the name of security and protection from potential terrorists or madmen, who haunt the imaginations of the authorities as bloodthirsty characters in search of verification of our corporeality through the destruction and fragmentation of our bodies, thus affirming paranoiac states of exception.

Now is also thirty-four years since Atkins' birth and seven since his father's death in 2009.

Most people's fathers die before they do, but for Atkins this fact of life became a founding moment just before his graduation from art school: it marked the start of his practice as a video maker with the creation of his first HD video *Paris Green*. His father was a graphic designer and an artist and writer in his own right, but never wished to show the world his art. The degree to which his death and its mourning are intimately connected to the emergence of Atkins' own artistic work is unfathomable, but forms the subject matter of an extremely important piece of diaristic writing by Atkins, reproduced in this book on p. 188, a commentary on his father's diaries, which he read snatches of after his death.<sup>vi</sup> In this essay, published online just a few months after the loss, the artist writes, "Recently, my father died of cancer. And although this was sudden (and yet protracted, as modern death tends to be) and afforded little time to 'prepare,' he left behind a vast body of work through which one might posthumously get to know him better." While at the hospital and completely passive in the hands of nurses and doctors, his father still kept notebooks, written almost daily until his death, that were "brutally, painfully honest, describing in astonishingly uninhibited terms his terrible decline."<sup>vii</sup> Atkins suggests that it is precisely through this self-reflexive activity of observing one's life declining that his father was able to transcend the situation of passivity and gain a form of agency and thus freedom: "In his chronicling of his illness and his desperately reluctant capitulation to the indignity of dependence, he affirms his agency rather than resigns."<sup>viii</sup>

Now is nineteen years after 1997, a date inscribed like a digital tattoo on the forehead of the character in *Happy Birthday!!!*. When asked by email what 1997 refers to, since for me it was an important year (the year I saw Catherine David's documenta in Kassel), Atkins answered simply, "1997 is much more about a feeling. Not history, not present, just 1997. Something lyrically ambivalent there. . . ." Lyrically ambivalent – that is, unstable, uncertain, in a time out of time, or in a time that repeats cyclically over and over again, potentially joining the simplicity of experience and profoundness of knowledge; a feeling of something *in-between*, not quite proper history, like 1872, but no longer in the present here and now of 2016. Something like 2009, perhaps.

In coming to terms with the relationship between analog and digital, offline and online, the body in love and our projected and syncopated relations at a distance over time or through space, another lyrically ambivalent figure comes to mind – René Daumal, a French poet and writer of the "Simplistes" group (as opposed to the Surrealists). Daumal died in 1944 at the young age of 36 from

tuberculosis, probably or partly caused by an excessive use of inhaled drugs through which he had induced mystical experiences since 1924. Shortly before dying, Daumal was in the midst of writing the short allegorical novel *Mount Analogue*, which was first published posthumously in French in 1952.

*Mount Analogue*, which is also included in Atkins' reading list, tells the story in clear, scientific detail of the discovery and ascent of a mountain whose summit is impossible to reach but whose base is accessible to humans, suggesting an active and empirical journey that cannot reach its metaphysical destination. Along the way, they find *peradams*, objects that are of material substance but that reveal themselves visibly and tangibly only to their seekers. The novel ends mid-sentence and darkly with a comma, and suggests the paradox of collapsing ecosystems: "without them, a quantity of plants that are very important in fixing unstable terrains," The sentence describes the extinction of a rat species who ate sick wasps; as a consequence of the loss of the rats, the diseased wasps' illness spread to the healthy wasps until the wasps also became extinct, suggesting a negative chain reaction with a future collapse of the plant system whose reproduction depended on the wasps, and thus of the stability of the ground under our feet and earth itself.

In the "Notes Found Among the Author's Papers," published as an appendix to Daumal's philosophical novella, one of the most cited quotes on the internet appears:

You cannot stay on the summit forever – You have to come down again. So why bother in the first place? Just this. What is above knows what is below – But what is below does not know what is above... You climb, see. You descend and see no longer. But one has seen! There is an art of conducting one's self in the lower regions by the memory of what one saw higher up. When one can no longer see, one does at least still know.<sup>ix</sup>

In a strange reversal of Plato's cave (where mortals are down below in matter and know there is a higher world of ideas of which they can only catch a glimpse as shadows reflected from their fire onto the walls of the cave), for people like Atkins who grew up on the cusp of when computers became ubiquitous, could the "upper regions" be nothing other than so-called RL – real, corporeal life? And could the "art of conducting oneself in the lower regions" be the ethics and modalities by which we choose to act – or not to act in the virtual realm, as a conscious engagement with it in the light of enhancing the flourishing of embodied life on our planet?

There used to be a website, [www.edatkins.co.uk](http://www.edatkins.co.uk), but I cannot find it anymore. When I click on it, the web tells me the site has expired or the hosting has been removed. Talk about that. Once upon a time films were made of celluloid and there were DVDs.

"It is difficult to write about Ed because he is so intelligent and he is probably the best person to speak about his own work there could ever be," says a common friend of ours who wishes to remain anonymous. This fact indicates an extreme form of self-awareness and reflexivity, which is both a symptom of, and a resistance to, an exploded and explosive "mirror stage" of contemporary society, within which the digital world of immediate gratification and prediction enfolds us all, and where authenticity and sincerity, let alone the old concept of spontaneity, seem long-gone worthless notions. In the "old" Lacanian psychoanalytic, twentieth-century terms of my generation, ours is a world where the "real" seems no longer accessible via the "imaginary" and through the "symbolic" because the symbolic order – that is, the order of language – has been ejected by the "imaginary". The myth of a perfect future that technology should be able to offer us, to the degree that we madly chase after a direct relationship between the organic (so-called "life") and the technological

imaginary (our “smart” devices and digital prostheses), and what it can and might do for and with us in the future.

To tell the story differently: for several years, Atkins experimented with HD video, thinking about it critically through a number of tools, which included reading texts such as *The Space of Literature* (1955) by Maurice Blanchot, which is also on his reading list. Blanchot speaks of the disappearance of a “real life” referent to which images seem to allude to, and thus of the corpse as a paradoxically perfect image where “real” and “referent” coincide, since in a corpse the subject has surely disappeared – it has literally died. In critical writings about his art, as well as in his own statements in interviews, Atkins often underlines how his art attempts to reveal the cadaveric qualities, the violent deathly impulses and aspirations behind the desire to achieve extremely mimetic and hyperreal representations that high-definition technology voraciously and capitalistically seeks: the skin that really does look like skin – hair and blemishes included. At first, this was achieved through the typically modernist strategy of revealing the truth behind the illusion, by making visible what HD video tries to hide behind a seamless flow of images. This is achieved through the cutting and pasting and un-synchronous layering of sound and image, through sudden ruptures and jumps, short apparitions of promo title pages, the visible use of filters and much more, which in modernist terms is a collage technique. Atkins’ rebellion against the seamlessness of HD recalls the work of early modernists, resisting the machine of advertising and spectacle in the early twentieth century, itself a tragic era of blind faith in progress that led to the catastrophes of the mid-century. Atkins recalls one of the founders of collage, the German Dada artist Hannah Höch (1889–1978); the way in which she picked up scissors and cut up magazines and reconfigured their fragments to carefully craft the material “badly” was a violent political act of opposition and resistance; it was conscious – what Atkins would call “reflexive” – literally a *cutting-edge* art.

In a contemporary equivalent mode to picking up those magazines, Atkins purchased a CG (Computer Generated) model of a male character from the Turbosquid.com website that sells stock 3D models and texture maps used in computer graphics by creative consumers we sometimes call “prosumers,” who want to create a game or a VR (Virtual Reality) or AR (Augmented Reality) project. Then he used the Faceshift software – a program that, alongside Microsoft Kinect and a slew of other software products, captures motion and expression from a live performer that can then be used to animate the computer generated figure. He began to experiment, using his own self as the actor, transferring facial expressions and voice to the surrogate or avatar on his laptop like a video selfie in so far as he turned the camera on the laptop toward himself.<sup>x</sup> This is something similar to what ventriloquists have historically tried to do: to move life from the body of the ventriloquist to that of a puppet by moving it and throwing their voice. In this way, the singular traits of the actor are lost and something like the essence of his or her expressions is distilled and remapped onto a new character, a persona – albeit one radically retarded by comparison.

Atkins has used this process to capture himself, recording his own voice and facial movements on his laptop, to people a number of videos that are then screened in exhibition spaces via large projections, often onto leaning and free-standing walls. His solitary male characters live in a world of emotional fragility, solitude, depression and melancholy, pathetically suggesting the disorientation and potential collapse of white male subjectivity at the start of the twenty-first century. By also working with performance, where the artist is present, adjacent to or apart from the projection screen, or appearing simply as himself while reading a beautiful text in front of an audience, the Brechtian “fourth wall” is brought inside the space of the artwork. Contrary to the goal-oriented production of VR games, which might be to construct the best possible illusion, Atkins reveals, in a typically modern impulse toward authenticity, the magician’s trick as a trick.

What a relief, we feel, that there is somewhere, somehow, a subject who is simply a person. And if there is a person that is real, then the technology is also real enough that we may ask about the politics of its production – who are the workers that built the cell phone, the tablet and its case, what were their wages and do they have any leisure time themselves.

We wish to tell our stories, and in so doing what might it mean to give an account of ourselves and try to be painfully honest and uninhibited? Perhaps because we wish to reaffirm our agency as well as reconstitute our relations in so doing.

Although so different generationally and in appearance, Atkins' videos and performances may be read from this perspective in historical dialog with a number of earlier, pre-digital practices that are accounts of the artist. From Surrealist experiments with film to late twentieth-century works by artists such as Bruce Nauman, Joan Jonas and Dan Graham, we find investigations into subjectivity through the observation and recording of the artist's own experience as it is altered or constructed by recording technologies. In different ways, artists have asked, "Who am I and how do the optical technological devices at hand shape who I am?" Indeed, Nauman explored the limits of the body and of the everyday by filling one-hour videotapes with repeated actions in the studio such as bouncing against a wall in a corner of a room (*Bouncing in the Corner*, 1968) or by putting on make-up in front of a film camera for ten minutes in *Art Make-Up* (1967). In works such as *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), Jonas investigated the relationship between her body engaging on stage with props including mirrors and masks and her recorded mediated image projected back on the same stage to create a feedback loop, thus addressing the way the self is always fragmented and shifting, doubling and splicing. Graham tested his consciousness of corporeality through its relation with the media: the camera is an extension of the body in works such as *Body Press* (1970–72), where two subjects literally pressed 16mm cameras against their bodies while recording each other. Like Atkins' videos, these works can appear narcissistic. In many ways, however, to record the subject – to give an account of oneself – can only be attempted through an excess of reflexivity, the ability to observe oneself while acting.

In her 2005 book *Giving an Account of Oneself*, which is also included in Atkins' reading list and in the book collection in our library, Judith Butler suggests how such an attempt is bound up with the ethical imperative of responsibly (from "to respond") giving an account of oneself to another. Butler summarizes Adorno's view on the rise of moral questions in a subject expressed through a refusal of societal norms that are violently imposed once they have ceased to be self-evident in the life of a community: "there seems to be a tension between ethos and morality, such that a waning of the former is the condition for the waxing of the latter . . . this ethos becomes violence only once it has become an anachronism. What is strange historically – and temporally – about this form of ethical violence is that although the collective ethos has become anachronistic, it has not become past; it insists itself into the present as an anachronism."<sup>xi</sup> In order to pursue the aim of less violence in the world (itself Butler's main underlying goal in all her writings) it is necessary to reflect, she continues, on how the becoming-subject attempts to respond to the question "Who are you?" when it is asked by another subject whose engagement with us through this very question constitutes the basis of our own subject formation. The book explores how difficult and complex it is to "give an account" that is truthful to another who asks it of us. If the "I" is constituted in the relation with a "you" then the first question (as philosopher Adriana Cavarero, whom Butler quotes, also suggests as a constitutive sociality of the self<sup>xii</sup>) is how can I give an account of what precedes me as a knowing subject, and therefore exceeds me? According to Butler, such an attempt is bound to failure because of the fundamental opacity of ourselves *to* ourselves – a concept she borrows from psychoanalytical notions about the impossibility of access to ourselves in the early period of our life

prior to the emergence of a consciousness, which appears only in the moment it is able to respond to that first address.

Attempts to give such truthful accounts abound in documentary literary history, many of which are collected in the extraordinary compilation of personal testimonies published by John Carey, *Eyewitness to History* (1997), also in Atkins' reading list. In his introduction to this book of reportage, Carey writes, "All knowledge of the past which is not just supposition derives ultimately from people who can say, 'I was there,' as the assortment of chance bystanders, travellers, warriors, murderers, victims, and professional reporters I assemble here can. Another advantage is stylistic. Eye-witness accounts have the feel of truth because they are quick, subjective and incomplete, unlike objective or reconstituted history, which is laborious but dead."<sup>xiii</sup> Reading the accounts contained in Carey's anthology makes reality seem more horrid and outrageous than we could possibly imagine. It begins with Thucydides' description of the Plague of Athens in 430 BC: "The disease began, it is said, in Ethiopia beyond Egypt, and then descended into Egypt and Libya, and spread over the greater part of the King's territory. Then it suddenly fell upon the city of Athens, and attacked first the inhabitants of the Peiraeus... I shall describe its actual course, explaining the symptoms, from the study of which a person should be best able, having knowledge of it beforehand, to recognize it if it should ever break out again. For I had the disease myself and saw others sick of it."<sup>xiv</sup> The collection of writings, intensely macabre and grotesque in its accumulation of depicted cruelty, ends with a reportage of the Sabra and Chatila 1982 massacre, written just hours after the events occurred: "They were everywhere, in the road, in laneways, in backyards and broken rooms, beneath crumpled masonry and across the tops of garbage tips. The murderers – the Christian militiamen whom Israel had let into the camp to 'flush out the terrorists' fourteen hours before – had only just left. In some cases blood was still wet on the ground. When we had seen hundreds of bodies, we stopped counting."

Atkins' works mourn a subject and the failures of representation in the digital age. He expresses this in his writings, videos and performances through a bathos that straddles the media: strings of declarative sentences might just easily trail off with "etc." or manifest as jump-cut effects, landscapes, faces, farts. The world he evokes is falling apart, not dissimilarly to the world of the Mannerist period, by (ill) means of blind faith, both in religions and in scientific and technological advancements, so poignantly described in the erotic and religious poems by John Donne, also on Atkins' reading list, whose well-known 1611 poem of mourning, *An Anatomy of the World*, I recall here in fragments:

When that rich soul which to her heaven is gone,  
Whom all do celebrate, who know they have one  
(For who is sure he hath a soul, unless  
It see, and judge, and follow worthiness,  
And by deeds praise it? He who doth not this,  
May lodge an inmate soul, but 'tis not his)

...

This great consumption to a fever turn'd,  
And so the world had fits; it joy'd, it mourn'd;  
And, as men think, that agues physic are,  
And th' ague being spent, give over care,  
So thou, sick world, mistak'st thy self to be

Well, when alas, thou'rt in a lethargy.

...

And freely men confess that this world's spent,  
When in the planets and the firmament  
They seek so many new; they see that this  
Is crumbled out again to his atomies.  
'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone,  
All just supply, and all relation;  
Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot,  
For every man alone thinks he hath got  
To be a phoenix, and that then can be  
None of that kind, of which he is, but he.

...

She to whom this world must it self refer,  
As suburbs or the microcosm of her,  
She, she is dead; she's dead: when thou know'st this,  
Thou know'st how lame a cripple this world is.<sup>xv</sup>

And yet there is a humility in the recognition of the failure to give an account of oneself that Butler assumes as positive and healing: "The 'I' finds that, in the presence of the other, it is breaking down. It does not know itself; perhaps it never will. But is that the task, to know oneself? Is the final aim to achieve an adequate narrative account of a life? And should it be? Is the task to cover over through a narrative means the breakage, the rupture, that is constitutive of the 'I,' which quite forcefully binds the elements together as if it were perfectly possible, as if the break could be mended and defensive mastery restored? Before the other one cannot give an account of the 'I' who has been trying all along to give an account of itself. A certain humility must emerge in the process, perhaps also a certain knowingness about the limits of what there is to know."<sup>xvi</sup>

I believe Atkins might agree.

This is the way the world ends, not with a bang, but with a whimper.<sup>xvii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Atkins' statement in an interview made during his exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 2015, [http://arttube.nl/en/video/Stedelijk/Ed\\_Atkins](http://arttube.nl/en/video/Stedelijk/Ed_Atkins), accessed August 29, 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> Most video works by Ed Atkins deal with a similar re-corporealizing of the male body as a political act. Such an act could be read as feminist because the male figure is rarely corporeal in art and more often portrayed as an agent of social transformation. In an essay called "Whose Body Matters? Feminist Sociology and the Corporeal Turn in Sociology and Feminism," Anne Witz writes: "Simultaneously, woman is saturated with, while man is divested of, corporeality and she is divested while he is invested with sociality. The absent women in sociology were the women in the body excluded from the social. It is male bodies which animate the social – they appear for a fleeting moment, only to disappear immediately, in the space between 'corporeality' and 'sociality.' Thus, it is not simply a case of recuperating bodies into the social, but of excavating the gendered subtexts whereby *gendered* bodies were differently inscribed into and out of the social in the first place. The crucial point here is not the more familiar story of her saturation with corporeality but the less familiar one of what happened to *his* body – how, that is, did male sociologists effect the disappearance of their own bodies in the textual strategies of sociology?", in *Body and Society*, June 2000, vol. 6, no. 21–24: <http://bod.sagepub.com/content/6/2/1>, accessed August 26, 2016.

<sup>iii</sup> P. Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 345.

<sup>iv</sup> In *Happy Birthday!!!* the two arms and hands appear bare, yet the same holding position recalls the arms clad in a white lace shirt in the earlier video *Even Pricks* (2013), where they appear more feminine and motherly, and thus hover in ambiguity between love and aggression.



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<sup>v</sup> G. Sorrentino, *New and Selected Poems 1958–1998* (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 143.

<sup>vi</sup> Atkins is a prolific writer. In our digital times of cognitive capitalism, the “content providers” are the key class figures serving power and therefore they are also those who are able to undermine or affect dominant narratives through alternative non-productive writing. Atkins’ screenplays, critical writings and other scripts are histrionic, hyperbolic, melancholy and pathetic speech acts that partly recall Surrealist writing. Not by chance, Comte de Lautréamont’s *Chants de Maldoror* (1874) are also in Atkins’ reading list for the Castello di Rivoli library. A book of Atkins’ collected writings appears this year: *A Primer for Cadavers* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016).

<sup>vii</sup> Published in *Art Vehicle* online, no. 48, 2009, column “Asides” no. 13: <http://www.artvehicle.com/asides/13>, accessed August 26, 2016.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> R. Daumal, *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing* (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 1986), 110.

<sup>x</sup> “A new world yawns open,” he said of the first time he used face-recognition technology. “Sitting there, pulling faces to entertain myself with an avatar of me, a live feed? It’s like, ‘Oh, god, I could be trapped here,’ you know? This horrendous clinch between me and – me and what?” (E. Atkins in *The New Yorker*, May 20, 2016).

<sup>xi</sup> J. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 4–5.

<sup>xii</sup> A. Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, translated by P. A. Kottman (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>xiii</sup> J. Carey, *Eyewitness to History* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2003), xxix.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>xv</sup> J. Donne, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. by Robin Robbins (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 815 ff.

<sup>xvi</sup> Butler, *Giving an Account*, 69.

<sup>xvii</sup> T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men,” which I allude to here, is not on Atkins’ reading list. See T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems & Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004).