

Marc Atkins.

edited by Michel Delville
Collections artistiques de l'Université de Liège

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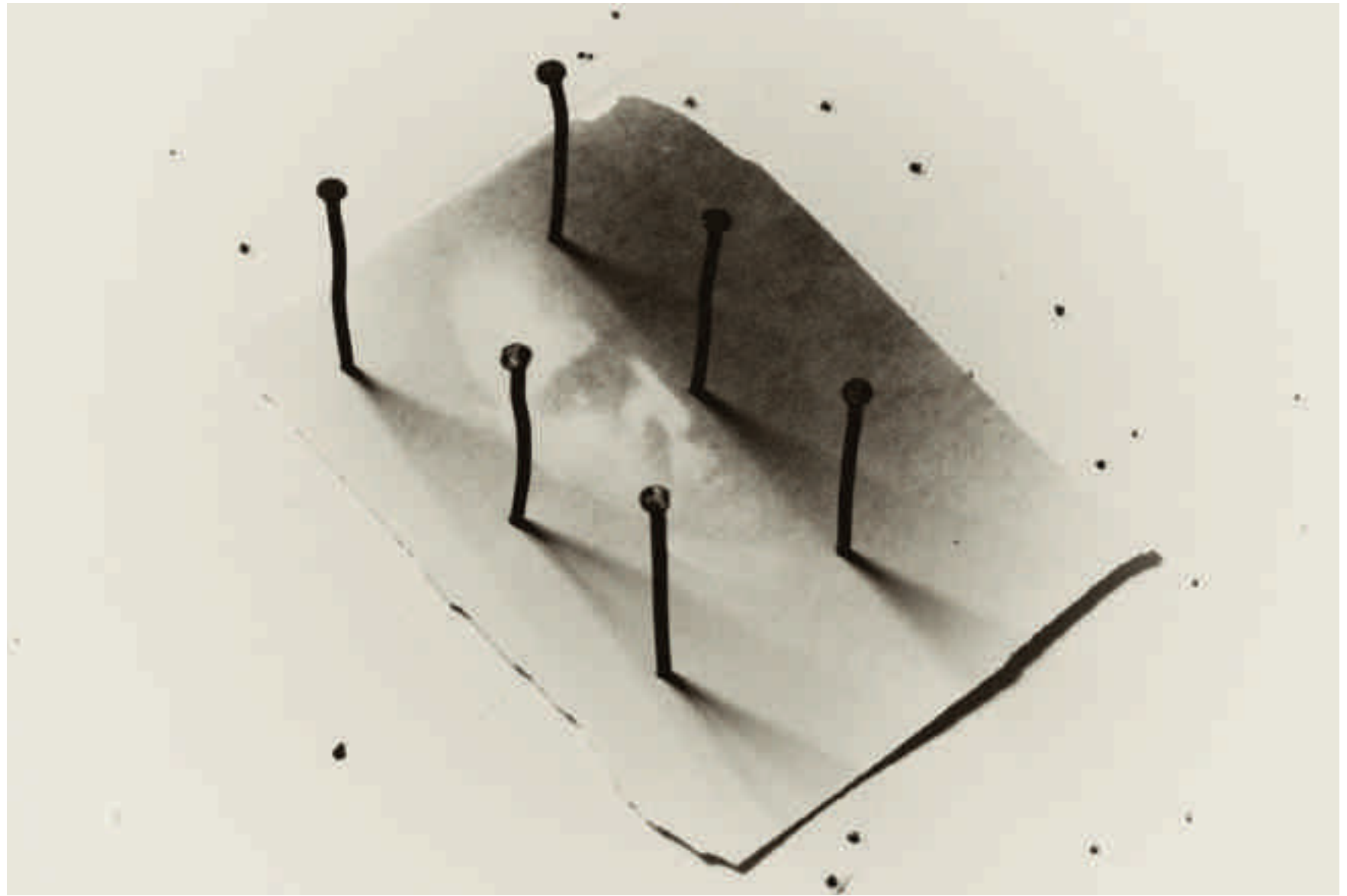
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MICHEL DELVILLE

Preface

Few contemporary artists have done as much as Marc Atkins to cross the aesthetic and institutional divides between the arts. His prolific output, which ranges from photography to poetry, soundscapes and film — making him one of the most transdisciplinary artists around —, have established him as one of the most intriguing presences on the art scene today, one whose works display haunting textures and enthralling patterns which cannot be contained within any artistic tradition, whether canonical or marginal. More than a quarter century now separates Atkins' early published photographic works from his recent *Invisibles* series or the publication of his latest poetry collection, *The Prism Walls*. As 2015 draws to a close, the time seems ripe for a retrospective look at his career.

Atkins has been variously described as a psycho-geographer of London's "dark places, secret histories and 'sinister characters'" (Jonathan Jones), a Blakean visionary (Gareth Evans), a neo-Surrealist in the vein of Man Ray (Tristian Quinn), and a powerful advocate of verticality and profundity in an age of depthless and superficial styles (yours truly). Because of his ongoing interest in the meanders of the perceiving mind, it would be tempting to pigeonhole Atkins as a Surrealist artist picking up where some of his mentors left off. But where some of his photographs harken back to Man Ray or Maurice Tabard while developing their own distinctive voice, Atkins' oeuvre so far shows a broad horizon and a remarkable spectrum of creative materials and experiments, all grounded in the back and forth movement between image and word which produces meaning and purpose.

Atkins himself says his work is rooted in an attempt

to "make manifest the characters and elements [he] see[s] occupying the place, the pause, the exact point of crossover between states of existence". "It is usually in the redolence of a room or the multi layering of the city," he goes on, "that [he] find[s] this field of the invisible and the latent forms which become [his] images ... the lost frames of a film, elements of an endless performance, or the few discovered pages of a missing tome, each suggesting a story which continues beyond its borders." It is precisely the passage from one state of awareness to another which arrests the eye, whether it manifests itself in a photograph, a video, a poem or a book or CD cover. Perhaps this is what has acquired Atkins a reputation for being a liminal, "crepuscular" artist, crossing the threshold between the conscious and the unconscious, the rational and the intuitive mind.

This dimension of Atkins' art is on dazzling display in his recent turn to prose poetry, a medium which, since Baudelaire, has proved particularly apt to capture the actual mechanism of thought and meaning. Even though his collections of prose poems have started to establish him as an important representative of the genre, Atkins is perhaps better known to literary audiences for his investigation of the convoluted, subterranean connections that define the architectural, cultural and literary heritage of London. This aspect of his work is reflected in his collaborative books with Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997) and *Liquid City* (1999). Atkins' and Sinclair's attempts to map and interpret the most idiosyncratic and esoteric corners of London life in a way that does justice to the multi-layered history of the London multiverse allies them with his fellow London psycho-geographers Michael Moorcock, Peter Ackroyd and Alan Moore. While writer Melanie McGrath has characterised *Liquid City* as "Alice in Wonderland for urban intellectuals", the book has been described perhaps more accurately by Original Public Image Ltd bassist and ambient dub

pioneer Jah Wobble as "an alchemical homage to the mystery of light and dark", one whose works display haunting textures and enthralling patterns which cannot be contained within any artistic tradition, whether canonical or marginal. Atkins' work is invariably haunting, vexing and thought-provoking, refining many ideas developed over the years.

Carrying on and deploying itself beyond the massive and complex legacy of Surrealism and Situationism, Atkins' work has developed many different directions over the years. The images and texts contained in this book suggest that the difficulty of "placing" Atkins' work in the spectrum of contemporary art partly results from the sheer diversity of the media explored in his oeuvre, which makes it hard to pin down as a single, unified entity. However, a closer look at the works themselves reveals that beneath the diversity lies a stunning sense of consistency and continuity which invites contemplation. Atkins' art is invariably haunting, vexing and thought-provoking. While its complexity and richness of substance embodies varying degrees of ambiguity and uncertainty, it is almost unearthly in its delicacy and sobriety. His images and poems refuse to give us secure bearings and take us into a space where abandoning oneself to the tensions of (re-)presentation and remembrance becomes an endless source of pleasure and fascination.

Generating different, often conflicting trains of thought, emotion and conceptualisation in viewers, Atkins' art derives its intensity and lasting power from that peculiar blend of opacity and transparency, mystery and revelation, which is the mark of great artists. As the perception of light, space, time and detail becomes a subject of enquiry in itself, Atkins' art seems to exist in and out of time as well as outside accepted or institutionalised notions of transcendence and immanence. It is our hope that this volume reflects the full range of the artist's singular voice and vision.



Unwatchable

The pain is unwatchable. Noise traffics fortunes with a rattling mind, unsullied gardens trade troubling green for the pleasure of living indoors, the dirt on the floor makes its way back to worn torn worm-holes, bristling on the soles of our hands. Sitting along broken benches the rocks falling about as the pleasant rain of sundry afternoons smile in the warm light. But don't move overly, ten minutes to reach the top, no fifteen, she said five, and was right. It would take her fifteen. It would take her five. Five mornings a week bolstering the noises falling from the hole in the wall. In rat-like scurrying, the machine rattles then goes silent for a bit. Just the unticking clock now waits for the next move. Trap the words, as the ideas fly into view, open the cage door, then stable them down with plenty of fodder. The dripping red wing turning carelessly into the machine.

unreadable text on the right page











EVIE SALMON

Dark Matter

These images can be seen as the lost frames of a film, elements of an endless performance, or the few discovered pages of a missing tome, each suggesting a story which continues beyond its borders.

—Marc Atkins, Artist Statement¹

Active. Empty.

—Marc Atkins, *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*²

the wedding of light and matter – an alchemical conjunction

—Derek Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*³

Dark matter cannot be seen but its existence is inferred from its effects on visible matter. Astrophysics' own metaphysical mystery, dark matter embodies the liminal. It is "Active. Empty."⁴ Burning through light in the dark room, Atkins' *Invisibles* series exerts a similar effect upon the viewer. Resonating with obsidian energy, the images in this collection open the eye to a black hole in the sphere of the visual.

Invisibles. The plural is evocative – if not provocative – as it rubs our noses in the poverty of vision; the many things we cannot see: an unknown opportunity cost. Viewed in the shadow of their collective title, do these images reveal the invisible or document the unseen? Are there multiple layers of invisibility? Is the fulcrum of the image that which cannot be seen? Naming the visual invisible, are we the apparitions on the other



side of the mirror, the viewers that the occulted eyes and faces cannot see? For Atkins, all of the above. The images are, in part, offered as symbols of these questions: "The obscured faces and eyes represent seeking / seeing / knowing beyond merely looking at something."⁵

(In)visibility, (en)visioned, (sur)veilled, (un)seen. One could recall René Daumal's *peradam*: an object only visible to those seeking it.⁶ With *Invisibles* Atkins reveals his role as the seeker, uncovering the "field of the invisible."⁷ Or "Atkins as aerial, receiving the invisible signal."⁸ The collection bears witness to Atkins' engagement with the logic of the trace, that which leads, that which remains and that which is both present and absent. In his role as photographer and image-maker, Atkins makes manifest these ideas in a paradoxically optical form. It is this combination of epistemological uncertainty, a fascination with the dynamics of the unseen and a desire to produce images that speak of erasure, which constitutes what one could term the dark materiality of Atkins' work:

"*Invisibles*' is what I came to call a collection of images I have been working on over several years; they might be called 'The *Invisibles*'. They are, as all my 'images', ineffable forms which have emerged through the cracks in the substructure, yet these are more beyond reach, they are inhabitants of a world viewed from the corner of the eye, of glanced reflections from the window, desires barely remembered but longed for. Yes, all the images are

a form of documentation, but of course not wholly that, they, I trust, evoke more than the viewer sees. I look to imbed the multilayers of untrustworthy observations into a piece of work, with the aim of them seeping out over time into the world of the viewer of the piece."⁹

Or perhaps photography is the invisible. As Atkins comments further: "I would offer that a 'photograph' hardly exists (its tenuous grip on any form of reality being even more shaky given the development of digital image production, a system growing further from its antecedent by the day; a widening dichotomy between the analogue and numeric a whole debate in itself)."¹⁰

While the camera may be "cursed with memory"¹¹ these alchemically processed images gain, through interference and degradation, a new layer of history. The "shot is timeless."¹²

Like an alchemist's crucible the image becomes a zone of transformation: "the exact point of crossover between states of existence."¹³ There is "always a stalking, of the multiple clarities of the real, always the beautiful and disturbing, a slight un-ease before the light, a strange movement in the shadows at the edge"¹⁴ and in *Invisibles* Atkins explores the edge of form: the shadows between portraiture, landscape and still life. For Atkins: "The world is a palette from which to draw unlimited colour, all subject matter is to be worked with, all forms depicted."¹⁵

One can identify the alchemical principles of solve et coagula: analysing a substance into components before synthesizing the desirable elements into a new form. Palimpsestual and oneiric, the images in *Invisibles* follow Berger's imperative "testing, confirming and constructing a total view of reality."¹⁶ They are "images located below the surface of immediate visibility ...

images of subjective states.”¹⁷ This is “Photography as the Organization of the Unseen” and “A peeling away, the exposure of the image behind the image.”¹⁸

In the negative space just beyond the frame, Atkins uncovers the matter of the liminal. “It is at the plane of the dark glass, where the observer and the observed meet, where any real notion of the noumenon becoming the phenomenal can be revealed. I am just looking to represent what I discover in that world within the threshold, the unnameable forms which leak from the shadows.”¹⁹

The figures in *Invisibles* manifest this threshold of the noumenon becoming the phenomenon: the big bang where the metaphysical becomes the real. The glow of the figures evokes x-rays, white outs, reverse silhouettes. The viewer finds herself in communion with a holy (wholly?) other. This othering is apparent in the confusion of still life and portrait in apparent images of statues, which trompe the eye and further question form.



These light presences are numina, divine presences at the threshold.²⁰ The noumenon, numina, luminous: nouminous?



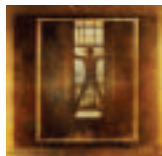
Now we are observed

The figures in this series have a depth, an umbra, a penumbra, that transcends gender: “The person as room, as city, as an intimate geography, as occupied territory.”²¹



“When I am making lens based images of anyone, I endeavour to capture ‘them’, or my perception of them, along with the ‘them’ they wish to reveal to me. So when I am working with nude women, or indeed men, we talk and work, and eat and work, explore, sit about, watch films, etcetera, and produce images together, imaging a personality of form and thought.”²²

And so “there results a trigonometry between camera, model and the spatial dimension that brings about release of a great brightness.”²³



A psychogeographer of the penumbral spaces between mediums, Atkins’ body of work comprises cinematic images, painterly video, film stills,²⁴ his writing straddling poetry and prose. In *The Logic of the Stairwell* poetry is haunted by image: “if a photograph could be of a shadow instead of its replacement.” In “Places Found and Imagined”²⁵ one finds a cinematic direction: “fade to black.” And *The Prism Walls*²⁶ suggests a wyrd architecture.

“Whatever it is I am looking to express, it bursts or seeps from me in writing, lens based processes, drawing, sculpture, I hardly consider the mode of transmission, I pretty much grab whatever is to hand, and if that process isn’t fulfilling the potentiality of the thought or desire I will try another medium . . . whatever it takes to get the thoughts, observations, ideas, unquieties, fascinations, out there. I see my artistic output, as one big installation or sculptural piece, the writing, sculpture, painting, drawing, film, photography, each are elements of the final, inevitably unfinished, multidimensional form.”²⁷

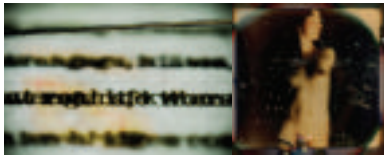
Recidivist collaborations with Rod Mengham and Iain Sinclair have also seen Atkins challenge the boundaries of text and image: “scraps of language are tautologous: there is already a powerful narrative element in the image.”²⁸ Accompanying Sinclair like Sontag’s “armed” flâneur,²⁹ a co-conspirator in his “eye-swipe” of the urban landscape,³⁰ their collaborations question the boundaries between modes of expression.³¹ Atkins also finds himself characterised in Sinclair’s work, haunting the text, challenging ideas of narrative and facticity.

In *Thirteen*³² Atkins’ nudes are described as “illustrated” with texts and this disciplinary liminality finds its telos in *Invisibles*. A viewer is confronted with texts visible and obscured. A framed fragment of text, perhaps from a “missing tome”? We are told it is Unwatchable. “The pain is unwatchable.” Another denial of the visible.



For Atkins, “Using words in combination with ‘plastic’ images is a process of blurring the boundaries between

the text and visual forms.”³³ The appropriation of the word in the image is sculptural and demands that we reconsider our reading of image and text. “There is the image and the word, and the image of the word. The ‘poetry of fire’ relies on the treatment of word and object as equivalent: both are luminous and opaque.”³⁴ The structure of language away from meaning is found in obscured text and a stained and discarded crumpled page. These are “light translations.”³⁵



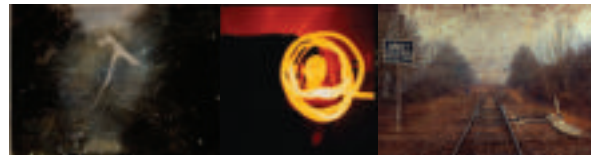
Even more, here “the images are ‘texts’ in their own right, they stand alone, their narrative, evocation and time fields are held within and permeate beyond their borders.”³⁶

The co-creation of Atkins’ occasional collaborative projects is subversive in itself: like quantum entanglement³⁷ it occupies a liminal creative space of combined energies, which resist lazy ego-focused analysis. Capturing an “urban state of mind”³⁸ alone and in collaboration, Atkins has excavated the urban landscape, its terrain and architecture. In *Invisibles* Atkins’ urban gaze is once removed: a structure abstracted and distanced through reproduction evokes the memory of a photograph.



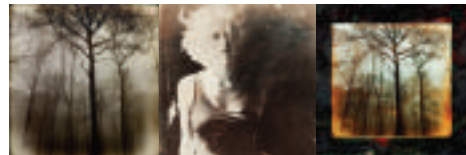
Rail tracks in landscape bridge the gap: the tracks

here are traces of the industrialised and urban. The rails are monochrome, excoriated, radiating orange³⁹ and fading out: overtaken by the land? The sidings occupying their own edge space.



Then, the escape complete, Atkins’ lens confronts sculptural, high rise trees. The viewer is invited to cast their gaze upwards towards a countercultural sublime.

There are echoes here of *Fields of England*, Atkins’ latest collaboration with Rod Mengham. One can track an interesting progression from urban dérives to the pastoral.



For Atkins:

“I would say the central differences between the pastoral and urban is the former is more about the horizontal and latter the vertical, also, as I said in *Liquid City* ‘There is no shadow when you go across the desert. You see mountains. The light hits them flat on. You look across the plain: no shadows. It’s all light.’⁴⁰ For ‘desert’ read pastoral. The Urban is of course the eternal interaction between light and shadow.”⁴¹

This turn in Atkins’ work towards the chthonic of

the pastoral is timely, located at the vanguard of a “geographic turn” in contemporary counterculture.⁴² In *Psychogeographia Ruralis*, his study of landscape and the imagination, Phil Legard reads psychogeography as a predominantly urban form. Understood as “an interdisciplinary practice that professes to study the effects of the environment on the emotion and behaviour of individuals” Legard acknowledges the efficacy of psychogeography in questioning the control structures of urban architecture. However, when applied to a consideration of what he calls “the complex and fractal forms of nature”, Legard sees the limitations of the term. The study of the effect of outer forces upon the inner space of the subject, relies upon the assumption of a distinct partition between the two. ‘Nature’, broadly conceptualised, does not follow such geometric delineations, nor does this ‘outside in’ trajectory give attention to what occurs at the membranous and liminal space between. As a response, Legard offers a second term: psychogeography the study not just of our reaction to the outer landscape but the continued resonance of these places “as they are reflected in our psyche or ‘soul’”.⁴³ Here we see an awareness of sensory response, mnemonic association and emotional attachment in addition to the effects of external stimuli. As Legard explains:

“Such terrain is malleable . . . Such imagery, stemming from such fusions of dream and geography, may be termed ‘visionary’ lore and related to ‘shamanic’ experiences whereby real-world locations provide points of ingress to a ‘psychic’ underworld.”⁴⁴

Atkins’ images occupy this psychegeographical terrain.

Away from the pace of the urban walk, they are meditative and speak to our shared biology. They constitute a form of radicalised dreaming.

Atkins' dark art is to occupy the penumbral spaces between cinema, photography, painting, poetry and prose. In *Invisibles* these often cinematic images break our Prism Walls asunder. In his work we see the haunting of mediums by other mediums: we see the psycho-geography of those mediated terrains, a media based hauntology. Atkins is the cartographer of the void.

¹ Artist statement retrieved from www.marcatkins.com

² Marc Atkins, "Afterwords," in *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*. Exeter, Shearsman Books, 2011, 23.

³ Derek Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010, 188.

⁴ Marc Atkins, "Afterwords," in *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*, op. cit., 23.

⁵ Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

⁶ René Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue*. Paris, Gallimard, 1952. The peradam was a mysterious crystal. One might see an echo of the crystalline (al)chemical processes of photography.

⁷ Marc Atkins, artist statement.

⁸ "The Man who works with silence and with light," *Entropy*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 35.⁹ Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See Julian Wolfreys, "The Hauntological Example: The City as the Haunt of Writing in the Texts of Iain Sinclair," in J. Wolfreys, *Deconstruction: Derrida*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.

¹² Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*. London: Granta Books, 1997, 270.

¹³ Marc Atkins, artist statement.

¹⁴ "The Man who works with silence and with light," op. cit., 35.

¹⁵ Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

¹⁶ John Berger, "Understanding a Photograph," in J. Berger, *Selected Essays and Articles: The Look of Things*. London, Penguin, 1972.

¹⁷ Marc Atkins, artist statement.

¹⁸ "The Man who works with silence and with light," op. cit., 35.

¹⁹ Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

²⁰ Recalling Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige*. Breslau: Trewendt und Granier, 1917: the experience of the divine as the numinous, from numen: divine power.

²¹ "The Man who works with silence and with light," op. cit., 35.

²² Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

²³ "The Man who works with silence and with light," op. cit., 35.

²⁴ As in Marc Atkins, Rod Mengham, *STILL Moving*. London: Veer Books, 2014.

²⁵ Marc Atkins, *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*, op. cit., 25.

²⁶ Marc Atkins, *The Prism Walls*. London, Contraband, 2014.

²⁷ Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

²⁸ Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, op. cit., 267.

²⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*. London, Penguin, 2002, 55.

³⁰ Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital*. London, Granta Books, 2002, 91.

³¹ One can note an interesting reversal, whereas in *Lights Out for the Territory* text has the lead role, in *Liquid City* images are the focus. See Rod Mengham, "The Elegiac Imperative," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Winter, 2001), 173.³² Marc Atkins et al, *Thirteen*. London, The Do-Not Press, 2002.

³³ Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

³⁴ Derek Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, op. cit., 129.

³⁵ "The Man who works with silence and with light," op. cit., 35.

³⁶ Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

³⁷ Einstein, Podolsky, Rosen (1935) "Can Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physical Reality Be Considered Complete?" *Phys. Rev.* 47 (10) 777; Schrödinger and Dirac, (1936) "Probability Relations between separated systems" *Mathematical Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society* 32 (3) 446.

³⁸ Jonathan Jones, *The Guardian*, 2 March 2000.

³⁹ Here one could recall Atkins' "unlimited colour" as we "see" all monochrome in glorious technicolour thanks to an al(neuro)chemical transformation: M. Bannert and A. Bartels, "Decoding the Yellow of a Gray Banana" (2013) *Current Biology* 23, 2268.

⁴⁰ Marc Atkins and Iain Sinclair, *Liquid City*. London, Reaktion Books, 1999, 10.

⁴¹ Marc Atkins interview with Evie Salmon, 31 July 2015.

⁴² A turn that I have traced in my own work, see the ongoing Alchemical Landscape project here: thealchemicallandscape.blogspot.co.uk.

⁴³ Phil Legard, *Psycho-geographia Ruralis*. Leeds, Larkfall Press, 2008.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*





Fear of the Dark

Do not forget ~~the~~ the opportunity of taking a photograph

I think about all that too. It seems like yesterday. Miss your looks. Love you always.

Do not forget to love with the woman who will ~~be~~ ~~with~~ ~~you~~ ~~for~~ ~~the~~ ~~rest~~ ~~of~~ ~~her~~ ~~life~~. ~~Do~~ ~~not~~ ~~forget~~ ~~to~~ ~~love~~ ~~her~~ ~~with~~ ~~all~~ ~~your~~ ~~heart~~ ~~and~~ ~~soul~~. ~~Do~~ ~~not~~ ~~forget~~ ~~to~~ ~~love~~ ~~her~~ ~~with~~ ~~all~~ ~~your~~ ~~heart~~ ~~and~~ ~~soul~~.

TADEUSZ PIÓRO

“Forgotten tongues never let you go”: Reading Marc Atkins’ *The Logic of the Stairwell*

The Logic of the Stairwell is a collection of Marc Atkins’ prose poems, seventeen in all, ranging in length from a brief paragraph to fourteen pages.¹ The poems are densely imagistic, yet, strangely enough, quite dramatic, even though the usual prerequisite for drama – narrative – appears only in fits and starts, without any noticeable continuity. I think that reading it in isolation from Atkins’ photographic work would hinder comprehension, and while the book remains an autonomous work of literature, it is no less valuable and interesting as a verbal “reflection” of the photographs, or at least of their most salient traits.

The full title of Atkins’ book is *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*. This clue to interpretation is reinforced in “Places Found and Imagined”: “Find the meaning in the title. The rest is explanation” (31). In terms of hermeneutic advice, it’s hard to be more perverse, or preposterous. And yet, the message seems clear: read these texts like images. So let’s give it a try.

Sleep is a plastic wrapped suffocation chamber. It is the room which enters you pouring acrid light over your healing thoughts and exposes them with razor scaled endoscopes. Sleep is a damp collection of some tedious answers.

Look how skinny you have become. There just there no just there ahh damn missed it again that fleet footed thought which never quite comes into focus. Could that it would answer every riddle and put all anxieties at ease. We pilgrimaged to the perimeter fence as there is always something without. We found expectation easing its grip. There are many good things in my pantry but none of which I want whereas you my

lopsided friend know truly what you want and what you want is to stand is a quiet room. I will see again the blank skies reflected in her blank eyes staring at the hole that falls through the earth where the tumour was removed with despicable sorrow. Each tower and mountain is focused cogitation where each street and valley is putrefying flesh. Forgiven tongues don’t answer. Foreign tongues lick the sweat from your neck. Forgotten tongues plead silently and never let you go.

Our brains are wrapped in cellophane. The city looks better with the curtains closed. The tap dripping reminds us that you are the long dead. (18)

I propose the following exercise: turn every sentence into an image you can visualize more or less clearly. Perhaps “challenge” is a better word than “exercise” since many of the quoted sentences seem to refer to abstract ideas or intangible emotions which may be made visible and readily recognizable only through some sort of conventionalised allegory. Yet this obviously is not the case in Atkins’ text which remains original and forceful even in its obscure moments. Take the following sequence: “Forgiven tongues don’t answer. Foreign tongues lick the sweat from your neck. Forgotten tongues plead silently and never let you go.” Do you see three images of a tongue? Or of forgiveness, foreignness and forgetting? I certainly don’t. But I can imagine a photographer doing three takes of the same object and see through his lens, so to speak, yet not out into the world, but into his mind. The adjectival variations could be an allegorical representation of the process of taking a picture (a numerically more literal one would probably require three hundred, instead of just three, variations).

Thus taking a picture may be seen as “an act of the mind trying to find what will suffice,”² as Wallace Stevens defines the writing of poems, but writing about this process or experience does not usually involve poetic language. We can regard a photographer as a poet of sorts, but when he writes an extended poem about taking pictures, our hermeneutic

apparatus might be in need of an upgrade. To put all this plainly: *The Logic of the Stairwell* functions on at least two planes, the most noticeable of which are the sovereign verbal image and the writing subject’s emotions suggested by the image. What makes this fairly simple arrangement complex is the fact that the writing subject is a professional creator of photographic images, and that there is a constant give and take between his sensibilities as a writer and as a photographer and, therefore, between the rules or misrules of verbal and visual representation.

Allow me to return to the text itself, and particularly to its misrule, still taking my cues from the passage quoted above. Sleep “is a room which enters you”; “look how skinny you have become”; “you my lopsided friend know truly what you want and what you want is to stand in a quiet room”; “the tap dripping reminds us that you are the long dead”. Each of these phrases contains the pronoun “you,” but it would be risky to assign a fixed referent to it. In the first phrase, “you” might mean “one,” but not so in the others. Who is the “lopsided friend”, or who might “the long dead” be, we simply have no clue. What might help is to read these sentences as (darkly or eerily) ekphrastic: you have become skinny in this photographic image; you are lopsided because that’s what your shadow looks like in a different picture. While this does not tell us directly who the “you” is (a living human being or a skeleton?), we get an idea of what the statements or fragments of conversation in the passage most likely concern. But then comes the finale: “the tap dripping reminds us that you are the long dead”.

We pass from image to interpretation and reflection, and I would not rule out that the subject of the reflection is the author himself. In “The Damned,” he writes: “Idly I pored through the note books and photographs which were strewn upon the floor. The earliest I marked dated back some twenty years. In time I understood each as simply a suicide note” (42). This is a good example of the drama I mentioned earlier: instead of making a banal

statement, such as “photographs are about time,” Atkins says they are suicide notes, thus shifting the focus from the photographed world to the photographer. Remarkable, dark and eerie, especially for a photographer who has made so many self-portraits.

And yet, mortality is just a dialectical extreme, here and throughout the book. The drama of actual life, so to speak, is played out as the drama of memory in its intellectual and sensual forms. References to time and memory abound and are often linked to questions of light and shadow or darkness. Early on in the book, Atkins declares: “Light is time. Shade is space” (14). Even in a work full of categorical statements and grammatically simple sentences in the imperative mood, these two come off as apodictic, if only because of their idiosyncratic meaning. But if we look at them closely, a different, less self-evident logic should become apparent. Light makes vision possible, and thereby knowledge, narrative, and finally remembrance. As a separate dimension, shade is the space of not-knowing, of narrative absence and amnesia, which qualities do not rule out suspense and drama. Atkins’ photographs represent, or actually enact this, quite frequently. So does *The Logic of the Stairwell*. The sentence immediately following: “Kazimir Malevich saw fifty thousand days and fifty thousand hours add up to a blackening square”, expands on the two earlier ones and seems to endow them with a (dark?) purpose. Light and time are condensed to a black square, possibly signifying absolute darkness, a point of no return.

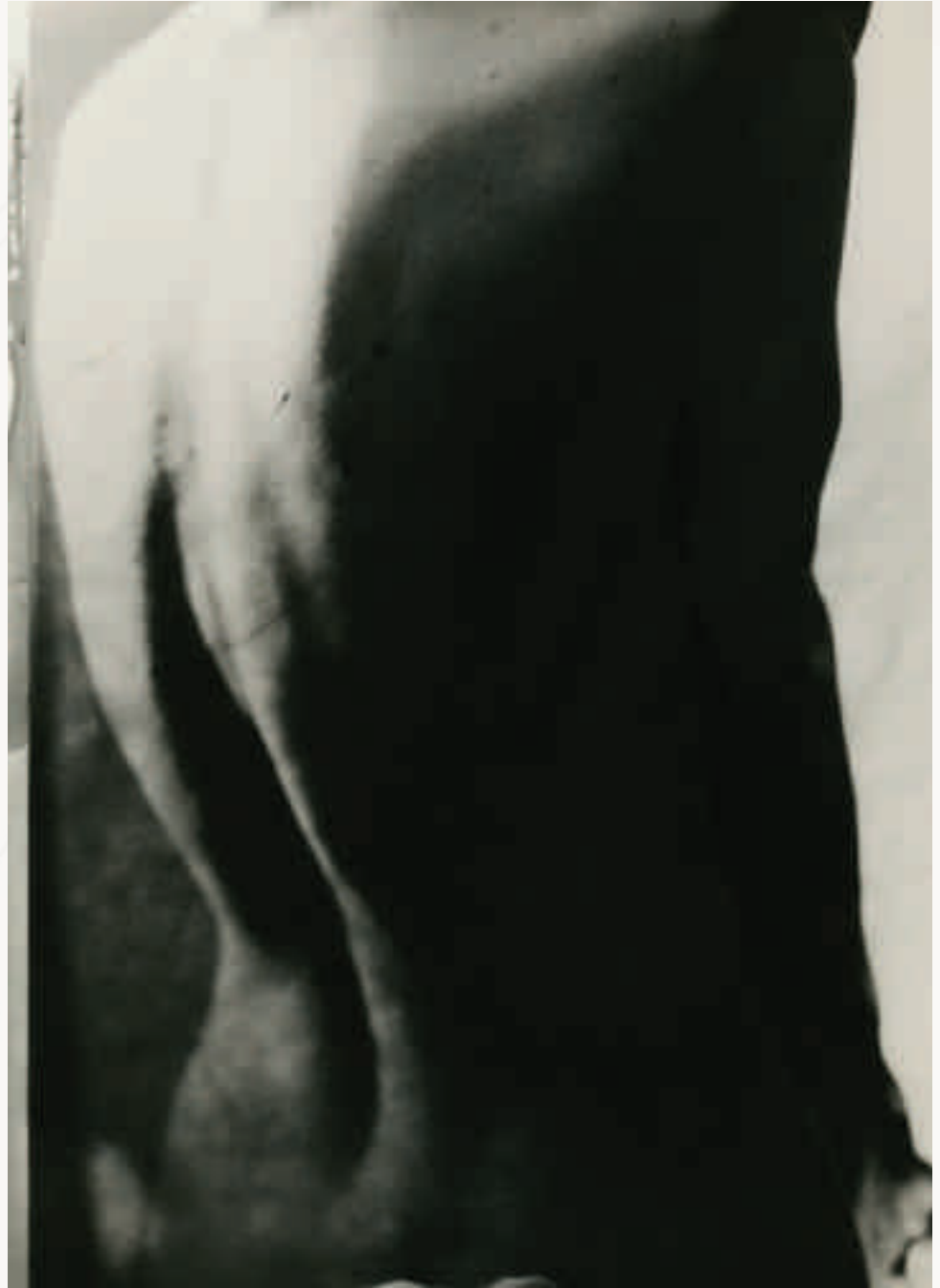
Nevertheless, in the book as a whole, Atkins usually sticks to the identification of time with light and memory, even though not all memories are pleasant, while most make us aware of the unattainable past. In this context, recovery or recuperation would not be not the appropriate words, if only because of their worn-out-ness in the discourse of literary criticism. Also, Atkins knows that the pleasure of reminiscing lies in the illusion that the past can be physically relived, an illusion which lasts as long as the

daydream resists the reality principle and which has little or nothing in common with the theory of lyric recuperation. Hence the word “attainable”, as both a type of illusion and a way into Atkins’ central, albeit concealed, allegory: “The meaning is in the title”, and so is the allegory, and the title is *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*. Because of the fairly high incidence of puns in the book, I feel justified in reading “stairwell” both literally and as a command: “stare well,” look long and hard. One of the six images on the book’s front cover shows a stairwell, winding like a Yeatsian gyre, or Hegel’s progress of Spirit, or what Ezra Pound called a “Dantescan rising”, each of these associations suggesting a teleological theory of time and history, with pure, spiritual vision and blinding light at its apex. Yet in Atkins’ picture, the view is from top to bottom: the suggested movement is from light to darkness, and this might be the real climax of the book’s drama.

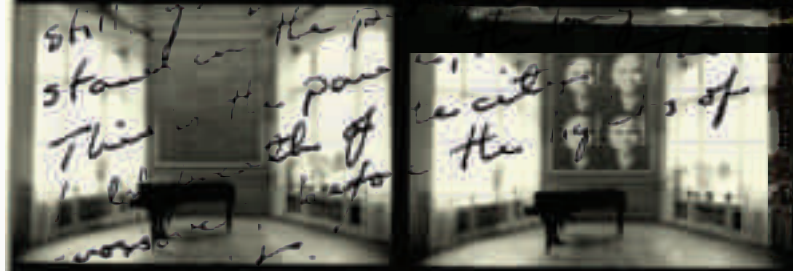


1 Marc Atkins, *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*. Shearsman Books, Exeter, 2011. Numbers in parentheses refer to this edition.

2 Wallace Stevens, “Of Modern Poetry”, in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York, Vintage, 1990, 239.



The city brings into the
head of each of us.
The last of the sun laying
its false sun across the
topiared skyline. With the
unaged sky above, we
stand in the shadows.



The night
I hear the screams, distant,
far off, perhaps in the past
or beyond the windows. Not
inside this room.



ROD MENGHAM

Cul-de-sac Cinema



Marc Atkins's "Impasse" is the purest of meta-filmic statements. Its title is not a perversity, or an act of sheer contrariness. To give a sequence of images ostensibly all about journeying a title equivalent to "no through road" is to follow through a logic of film-making. Film is always aspiring to capture what must always elude the attempt — movement itself — since movement is strictly unrepeatable and film can offer only pale copies of sights and sounds lost on the air. But film echoes movement better than anything else, and it is therefore the best container for desire, our desire to cherish and give value to what is lost. Like the touch of Midas, it kills off what is most precious.

Every time we watch a film, we rehearse this scenario: by trying to get back in touch with movement, we push it further away; and the more attempts we make, the more it recedes. We can only experience a film by watching and listening to it, but at its heart this experience is one of repetition, of diminishing echoes moving away from source. Atkins saturates his film with as many movements as it will take. But these movements are often already doubled, trebled, quadrupled. The rhythm of the work combines the illusion of steady onward travel with several small acts of recursion. A pair of girls march forwards,

backwards, forwards, backwards, several times; a dog leaps over its owner's stick repeatedly, out of an eagerness that becomes mechanicalness; the flux and reflux of the waves draw forth exactly the same human gesture on each successive occasion. Celluloid films used to be reeled from one spool to another, exposing their audience to a series of sights and sounds no sooner registered than left behind. Atkins's film does not reproduce this one-directional flow, but hesitates it, with subtle oscillations of backwards and forwards movements, like the "scratch" movements of a DJ generating loops of sound from a vinyl recording. There is a complementary pulse-like aspect to Atkins' own sound track, which seems to reproduce sounds emitted from two different sources, according to an alternating rhythm that fosters the illusion of sound waves travelling backwards and forwards between the same two points. The quality of sound suggests a vibrating membrane, organic in origin, but detected and broadcast by mechanical means. Less than a minute into the running time, Atkins introduces a passenger into the journey going nowhere, a passenger with the unmistakable profile of his muse, Françoise Lacroix. But human presences are not identified in Atkins's films, and are usually credited as "figures" — their function is to pass through, to travel between an unknown point of departure and an unconceived destination.

Wherever films are watched, whether in the cinema or on the computer screen, they take us to another place, makes us pass imaginatively through other rooms and landscapes. But in temporal terms, they bind us strictly to their own duration, and their passage through time is always in the here and now. There may be an allusion in "Impasse" to Antonioni's "The Passenger", where a journey through a landscape crosses paths with a journey through time, when one of the film's characters changes lives with another, following a different passage through history, making history come alive in unforeseeable ways. For the duration of every film, it is as if we are taking a ride on someone else's way of seeing, hearing, moving and being in the world —

while temporarily abandoning our own.

But there is another passenger — one more important than any human presence — introduced at the start of "Impasse", and that is the sun. The sun puts the human passenger literally and conceptually in the shade. The camera accompanies it; the camera pursues it, as it gets closer and closer to the horizon and gives a literal and conceptual aura to everything caught in its light. The ultimate focus of the film's attention is in fact the sun itself, which displaces every other spectacle, when the camera is turned directly towards the path of light it throws on the sea. The light visually obliterates the sea in its path, while the sea renders fluid the edges of this path. The Midas touch of the camera seems to turn water into liquid fire. The imagery is the same as that of Edvard Munch's many representations of sunset at sea, where the northern setting sharpens the poignancy of the sun's imminent disappearance; never more valued than during the moment before darkness, which can last for months in arctic latitudes. Atkins's setting is Mediterranean, but the animism of his representation of the sunset, with its desire to prolong or suspend the vitality of human and animal movements, to somehow prevent their cessation — a project as futile as preventing the disappearance of the sun — is ultimately more haunting; the celebration of an everyday loss whose beauty is never the same.



Admiral of Little Compton

The same day I was in
the night the same night
was the night of the
last of the storm. His
was another land. The
storm began like a
great fire in a large
house.

Towards the end of
the storm I saw the
house and the
ground. The
ground was
the same as
the ground
the ground
the ground

Wednesday is my fear - perhaps
the day of the storm was
at first by the water of
the house. Why is it that
the storm has not been
the same?

The first night of the storm
of the night of the storm
of the night of the storm
of the night of the storm

Tuesday is my fear - perhaps
the day of the storm was
at first by the water of
the house. Why is it that
the storm has not been
the same?

Wednesday is my fear - perhaps
the day of the storm was
at first by the water of
the house. Why is it that
the storm has not been
the same?





IN GRAIN

LOUIS ARMAND

Pornotropia

“Film,” David Lynch says, “is really like voyeurism. You sit there in the safety of the theatre, and seeing is such a powerful thing. And we want to see secret things, we really want to see them. New things. It drives you nuts, you know! And the more new and secret they are, the more you want to see them.”¹ The object mimes being in possession of a secret that the eye searches to see but is never able to attain. A body, genitals, a mask, a pair of shoes. Each functions not as the index of a hidden desire but as the (proffered) flesh of the image itself – the image through which, and by means of which, we seek to apprehend the secret it seemingly contains the way a mirror contains a reflection.

Cinema, photography, are here irreducible to the commonplace “pornography” of that which merely explicates or merely depicts – even if what is depicted ultimately remains an enigma. Indeed, despite much assertion to the contrary, there is very nearly nothing enigmatic about Lynch’s work itself: it conceals no “secret message,” no enveloped “content,” no revelatory “schema,” but is comprised almost wholly of surfaces, formal textures, *découpage*. Lynch’s work is structurally lucid in the way Thomas Ruff’s photo manipulations



Marc Atkins, from The Teratologists

may be called structural, or De Chirico’s paintings, or the novels of Robbe-Grillet. Like dreams, they articulate rather than “depict”; or, in spite of what they “depict”. Their logic is the already deconstructive logic of a de-piction.

This is perhaps nowhere more explicit than in Lynch’s 2006 film *Inland Empire*, with its fragmentary, collage-like narrative, its recursive image-hysteria and its relentless “foreignness” (in the manner of a type of *Alice through the Looking Glass*). *Inland Empire* is a type of visual prosthesis of itself and of Lynch’s oeuvre as a whole. Shifting between the Hollywood studio setting of *Mulholland Drive* and post-communist urban-industrial Łód in central Poland, the texture of the second half of *Inland Empire* recalls the disquieting work of photographer Marc Atkins, whose 1998 series *The Teratologists*, and 2001 series *Interstice*, both echo and anticipate Lynch. Atkins’s “shadowed portraits” evoke a mode of seeing whose objects stand for, and therefore symbolise, an absence which, at the same time, they seek to disavow. A body or a room translated into the “previously unseen activity” of the camera, the dark place behind the eye, the “escaped frames from a film.”²

These objects are the “Teratologists” that inhabit the technics of the photographic image the way



Marc Atkins, from Interstice

the “mystery man” in *Lost Highway* inhabits the “continuity” of Lynch’s cinematography – as a type of prosthetic agent directing the way we see. *The Teratologists*, Atkins says, are “creators of uncertainty and desire. Within a dark room, a place of memory, a curtain momentarily blows open. The glance of light from beyond the window exposes the previously unseen activity of the room: sculptural forms, shadowed portraits, escaped frames from a film ...” In *Interstice*, Atkins – working between abandoned factory locations in London and, as Lynch later would, Łód – creates interior parallel worlds, images within images, lost, obscured or reconstituted, their contours bleeding, visually over-saturated, into a “de-pictive” space or “de-pictive” time that has no other location than the image.

The image of the flash obliterates the identity of the model. An auto-portrait of the photographer whose face is held close to an illuminated lightbulb (this motif repeats elsewhere) lies on the floor. (The illusion here of a staged reflexivity, that we must come to recognise that the image of the camera is no more the spectre in the photograph than this “double” exposure is in the camera ...)

...

A torn photograph of a woman’s face nailed to a brick wall above a heavily eroded sign:



Marc Atkins, from Interstice

“AMONIAK.” One half of the face is entirely in shadow, the other half over-exposed. The shadow of the nail falls across the sign, cancelling it out: a cancelled sign, an anti-portrait . . . 3

But where Lynch enlists his setting to relentless hysteria that drives *Inland Empire*, Atkins explores an entirely different sense of “menace” which stems not from the dissociative proliferation of “parallel realities,” but from an invasive entropy. The light that unexpectedly exposes the “action” within the room, is in fact a kind of rigor mortis whereby the image, as Atkins says, is held. The visible assumes its cadaverous form. If *The Teratologists* invites the spectator to envisage a crime-in-progress, or a crime-about-to-happen, *Interstice* evokes a crime-scene, forensic photography, missing persons bureaus, the placards and portraits of the “disappeared” worn by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires (or anywhere that “disappearance” isn’t a metaphor but a general condition). With their neo-noir, colour-saturated aesthetic of motel rooms and venetian-blind chiaroscuro, *Interstice*’s images-within-images create a topology of implied or implicated space in lieu of “presences.” The image is withheld. If *The Teratologists* reads like a writ of habeas corpus, *Interstice* rests (or rather unrests) on the false adage that for there to be a crime, there has to be a corpse. Where *The Teratologists* gives the impression of having been recorded (staged) in a single studio, *Interstice* distributes its locations globally: London, Łódź, Berlin, Paris, New York, Stuttgart, Cambridge.

In a recent series published in VLAK magazine, entitled *Journey through a City*, Atkins extends this conceit in a series of locational shots that, at first glance, appear entirely bereft of life. These images no longer evoke crime scenes in which a photograph-within-a-photograph stands in for the missing body,

rather they suggest themselves as parts of some larger body: not a body-in-place, but a body of dis-place-ment (a psychogeography in celluloid stitched together with surgical twine – the “teratology” of this ab-normal anatomy). Again, as in *Interstice*, the “locations” are dis-placed: London, Warsaw, Paris, Munich, Katowice, Bratislava, but this time the aesthetic resonance is less neo- than proto-noir, strongly suggestive of



Marc Atkins, from *Journey Through a City*

tarnished daguerreotype, or early photogravure, but predominantly urban: the remains of habitations after all human life has disappeared, perhaps. The word “exposure” looms large here, evoking the mortuary timescale of Daguerre’s Paris or Fenton’s Crimea, in which the entire dynamic of the image spirals out of a type of internal entropy: the high visibility of these images seems born out of a paradoxical (it seems) cannibalisation of presence. *Journey through a City*, with its deep-focus black and white (the very opposite of Lynch: think *Citizen Kane* meets Louis-Ferdinand Céline), embodies a contradiction that the spectator cannot help but experience from the very first: the exquisite detail captured by Atkins’ lens digitally overlaid by “tarnish”: traces, if you like, not simply of an implied body (absent) in (or from) “place,” but a time-body. Where *Interstice* employed a form of montage to produce its effect, draws upon a “base materialism” which is both of the medium and ALSO a simulation of itself. “Through images as cracks in the superstructure,” Atkins writes, “I will suggest to you more than you immediately see.”⁴

Where Lynch’s work makes explicit appeal to the pornographic image as mannerist “fetish,” and exploits that level of desire (and disconcertion) in his viewers, Atkins puts on view the necrophiliac impulse that ultimately underwrites all such appeal: the object of desire, unattainable as it may be in conventional wisdom, is always mortified, or rather a mortification: a mortification, so to say, of desire itself. This adds to the implied meaning of “Equivalents” (the title of a 2001 exhibition of images by the artist exploiting similar concepts to those deployed in the “*Interstice*” series) in Atkins’ work – echoing, for example, the equivalence in Warhol achieved in juxtaposition between the “Death and Disaster” series and the “Marilyns” – exposing the capacity of entropy to surround itself with light (like Warhol, Atkins’ work might also be read as a “critique”

of commodity death, if it weren't also much more than that – entropy, after all, is impervious to critique, the real difficulty is understanding its omnipresence as possibility and as the limit of the possible: time and the irreversibility of time... the held image). In short, Atkins works at the limits of representability – as all good artists must – but in his case, the question is not simply one of acceding to or resisting one or another mimetic ideology, but of examining what gives rise to the impulse to “represent,” so to speak, or equally what makes it (“representation”) impossible: why it is that the history of photography is not so much the history of an illusion, but of an “unrealisable desire” (the only kind, in any case).

¹ David Lynch, *Lynch on Lynch*, ed. Chris Rodley. London, Faber, 2005, 145.

² Marc Atkins, *The Teratologists*, London, Panoptika, 1998.

³ Louis Armand, “*Equivalence Relation*,” *Interstice*. London, Panoptika, 2002.

⁴ Marc Atkins, “*Journey through a City*,” *VLAKE* 5 (2015), 282.





NIGHT ROAD END





CLIVE PHILLPOT

Paradise Cracked

[Marc Atkins #9]

The video begins. A disc revolves. Shallow water. View from a train. Out of a tunnel...

When he was a child (133) he thought like a cb-cb-child (290), then when he became a man he re-re-resolved to think (99) again like a child.

Un-clear. Dark. Inter-ference (233). Gloom. Glimpses. S-s-sub-conscious (97). Torn e-motions. The fire next time.

What in one is dark, illumine - what is low, raise and s- s-support (18) - so that to the height of this great de-velopment, we may assert e-ternal relevance.

But now he sees through (88) a glass d-d-darkly, facing directly into the f-f-face of chaos, knowing of life only in part, but under-standing the im-portance of clarity (300).

Over-lay. Montage (27). Palimpsest. Grinding. Syn-thesis. Fusion. Com-bine. Rauschenbergian. Amalgam (171).

In dim e-clipse (274) disastrous t-t-twilight spreads over n-n-nations, and, with fear of change (39), per-plexes mon-archs.

But though he may speak (91) with the t-t-tongues of m-m-men and an-gels, without clarity he can become an empty vessel (257) or a t-t-tinkling cymbal.

Sleep. D-d-dream. Threats. Clutter (213). Mechanics of being. Silted. Occupied (101). Way out.

But who shall tempt with w-w-wandering eyes the dark un-bottomed in-finite abyss (53), and through the p-p-palpable obscure find out his un-couth way (303), or spread his eerie flight upborn with in-defatigable wings (78).

But f-f-following this acceptance (17), he speaks an un-known t-t-tongue (401) that speaks not to m-m-men, but to god.

Investigation. Elapse. Wobble. R-r-repetition (63). Un-steady. Circular. Thud (111).

For this in-fernal pit shall never hold celestial spirits in bon-dage (287), nor the abyss - long under darkness - cover them (4).

But now, he abides in faith, hope and clarity (156), and the greatest of these states is clarity (366).

Essence. Ever-arriving. Staccato. Image merger (8). S-s-sucked in (93). Closing.

Accept this dark opprobrious den of shame (210), the prison of his ty-ranny who reigns by our delay (101).

Although he can both p-p-prophecy and under-stand (301) the m-m-mysterious - and even erase mountains - without clarity (199) all this is as nothing.

Crash of imagery. Dissolution. Melding (85). D-d-deeper. No way out. Black-ness (290).

Thoughts wander through e-ternity, to p-p-perish (223), swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of un-created night (18) de-void of sense and motion (333).

Along the tracks. Into a tunnel. Dark to light. A shadowy figure. The video ends.

FIN

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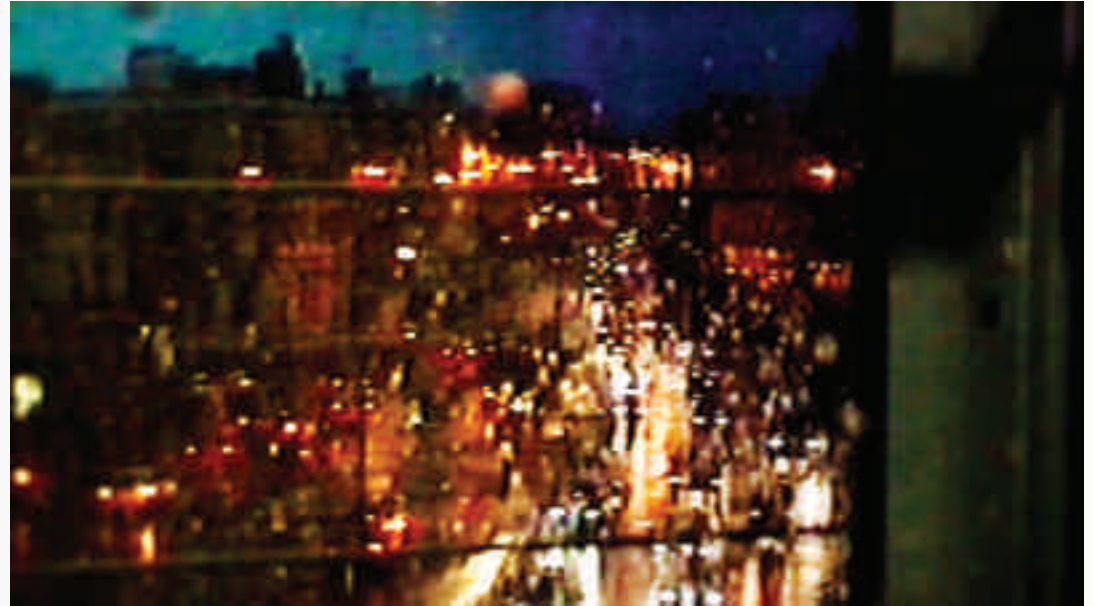
MICHEL DELVILLE

Still Moving

Pondering the changing tides of Matthew Arnold's self-haunting reveries, pausing importantly with pre-apocalyptic visions of the nuclear Gothic, engaging in a dialogue with the sombre undertones and of Seurat's depixelated pointillism, this collection takes us beyond the vanishing point of sight and consciousness. It becomes the site of a learning process where micro-distinctions and complexities pertaining to the drifting materiologies and psychogeographies of surfaces and textures can be investigated.

Still Moving appeals to the five senses and beyond. The focus is on confrontation rather than mere juxtaposition, whether between structures and variables, motion and stasis, word and images, depth and surfaces, inside and outside, or reflection and speculation. In apprehending of the erasures, discontinuities and reconfigurations of culture and history as they manifest themselves in close readings of natural and man-made landscapes, the collection partakes of the phenomenological turn which has characterized contemporary aesthetics. It also generates patterns of thinking which confer to thoughts and images the forceful presence of concrete things.

For Rod Mengham and Marc Atkins, cracking mirrors and counter-mirrors are not only a frontier between two worlds. They represent a systematic quest for desire, a haunted visual trope leaping towards an elsewhere as threatening as it is seducing, setting out to explore "the rear view of historical convergence", carefully recording instances in which the conjunctions, collisions and chiaroscuro of memory, fantasy and desire take us beyond the scope of the thinkable and the imaginable.







IAIN SINCLAIR

Hard Water, Soft Stone

Liquid City. The title came from Marc Atkins. He references the Thames as London's bloodline; a dangerous, sediment clogged artery under shifting, monumental skies. There is a quite distinct nod at the old Conradian pitch, coming upstream from Tilbury, witnessing sullen ghosts of industry, and catching glints of rising or dying sun on the towers of white churches and embryo investment silos. That romance is serviced, but the city of the essayist-photographer is now deserted, even by the robotic dead who once shuffled over London Bridge to their desks in King William Street. The river's tent is definitively broken, but the lifeless hump of the Millennium Dome is yet to be fully inflated. We are caught between times, rimming still mysterious edgelands, prospecting for narrative. "Is this London?" asks a bemused Frenchman, when our paths cross on the wrong side of the river, on the nursery slopes of Shooters Hill.

The audience is invited to step under the black hood. They are transported to a smoking Victorian slide show. Image bleeds into image in a panorama of monochrome blight. Captured authors and artists are frozen like Cesare Lombroso's generic malefactors. Significant stones and cracked monuments are assembled in a virtuoso display that should have been the first

exhibition in New Labour's flabby marquee on Bugsby's Marshes: real content, a secret history, in place of vacuous self-promotion.

Atkins may have nominated London as another Serenissima, city of canals, in the way that the original Situationists navigated Paris using Ralph Rumney's *Psychogeographic Map of Venice*, but he was also paying his respects, consciously or not, to Jonathan Raban's *Soft City* (1974). He trespassed down the byways of a neural labyrinth, exploiting, when he needed it, my well-worn grimoire of rivers and railways. The Minotaur of rapacious capitalism lurked in shadows that were the photographer's natural element. Atkins stalked with intent, a shaven-skulled Futurist. He waited for the moment when the curtain parted and the visible world confirmed, for a split second, an occulted script he had already prepared in one of the light-excluding, hideaway bunkers where he alchemised his grainy and ectoplasmic nude studies. The photographer had as many boltholes, back then, as Count Dracula. One of them, as was appropriate, in a tributary of Brick Lane actually listed by Bram Stoker. Raban's polis is permeable; it shape-shifts and leaks, but it has not yet turned to water. "It invites you to remake it," he says. "Decide who you are and the city will assume a fixed form around you." This peculiar liquidity is the floating market of Big Bang money-laundering and speculative investment; virtual profits skipping across multiple screens in their digital dance. My collaborative pilgrimages with Marc Atkins ended around the time he acquired an early mobile phone. And the nuisance twitter of electronic tagging interrupted our Lea Valley footfall.

Among the weightless quotations that make up the boundaries of *Liquid City*, the only humans are stopped walkers draining breakfast coffee or taking a cigar-smoke breather in some kind of post-traumatic

fugue. Faces of writers and artists, all of whom have investment in the presentation of London as a sump of myth, anchor torn fragments of memory-tape. Atkins is the persistent witness in the corner of the room. He traps off-duty performers on the steps of some previously unrecorded bunker, before the show begins. Or outside a crime-scene public house when the party is finally over and they're about to wash the blood from the steps.

I met him first when he came along, nobody quite knows why or how, on a film shoot in a pub on Cheshire Street. What I saw, as soon as he produced his prints, was how skilled the man was at making a legible geometry of a very fluid situation. The intersecting diagonals of sound boom and the white edge of a reflector board lock characters into barely connected roles. Casual reportage becomes profiction. The result looks inevitable, but I know from experience how difficult it is to achieve. These photographs have an ethnographic quality, pinning down the nerves of a vanished era. When viewed as a sequence, flicked prints evolve into an accidental feature film, like a version of Patrick Keiller's *London* remastered from a shooting script by Alan Moore. A graphic novel in which the speech bubbles have run away with themselves. *Liquid City* is a cut-up, a calculated assemblage from the hundreds of prints Atkins spreads out, in no particular order, on the studio floor.

The key expedition would be the morning's walk from Hackney to Herne Hill, to visit Professor Eric Mottram. During the long trudge through discriminations of place and portent, I tell Atkins everything I can remember about the poet and scholar. A literary sketch takes shape. When we arrive, Atkins makes his portrait. A couple of shots. And here is Eric, frozen, mid-monologue, glass at elbow, outstretched fingers pointing in both directions at once.

Looking through this portfolio from 1999, the dying embers of the last century, I see a useful reference book to the late-British franchise of psychogeography. All the sites are here: London Stone, Bunhill Fields, Arnold Circus, the Hardy Tree, Rodinsky's room, Hawksmoor churches, the Grain Tower in the Medway. And many of the names too: fading faces of the reforgeotten, the honoured dead. These are the dreamscape images behind and beyond much that I have written, but they are quite unlike my own snapshot research. Atkins is a master of the deep-topography of the suborned human face. Underneath archival nostalgia, a much more sinister realpolitik is festering: spectral traces of chalk quarries and brownfield sites soon to be "discovered" and improved out of existence. Now I begin to understand why I appear as a double man, a joined-at-the-shoulder Gilbert and George manikin in a black linen suit, on Lord Archer's balcony, with my back resolutely turned against the crumbling money pit of the Palace of Westminster.





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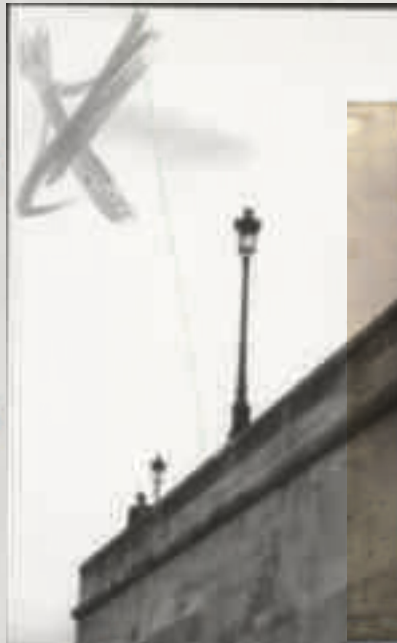
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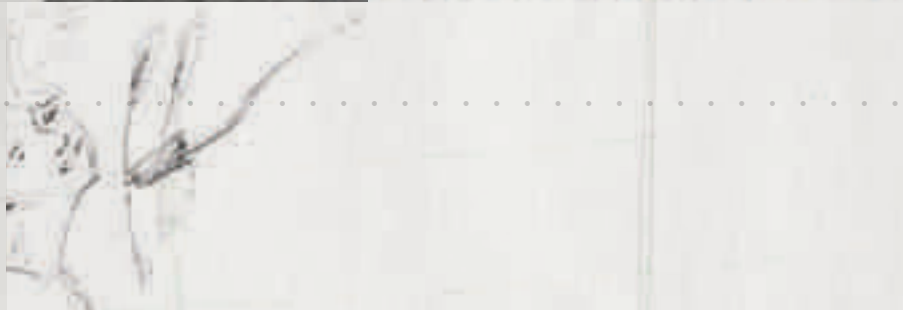
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INNER



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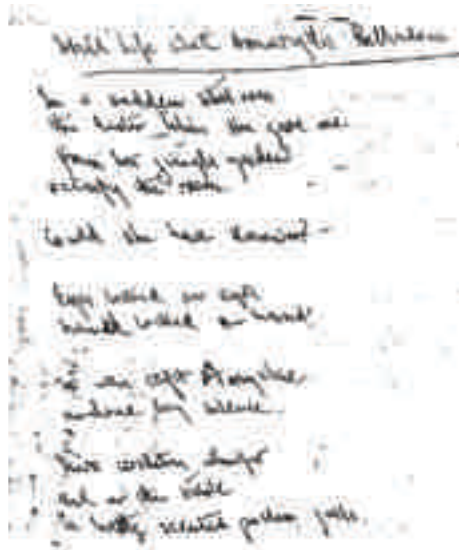
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JOHN KINSELLA

Transferences of Place

“Below the surface-stream, shallow and light” —
Transferences of Weiriding Place: Through the Eye of
Randolph Stow’s “Still Life with Amaryllis Belladonna” We
Approach and Reproach the Pastoral and Arrive at a Reading
of STILL Moving (by Marc Atkins and Rod Mengham)



Still Life with Amaryllis Belladonna

In a sudden stillness
the Easter lilies she gave me
from her jungle garden
occupy the room.

Could she have known?

Eyes locked on eyes
Hands locked on hands.

So was rapt Amyclae
undone by silence.

Two watches whisper
and on the table
a little scented pollen falls.

— Randolph Stow²

It was only shortly before the first Messenian war that the town was conquered by the Spartan king Teleclus. (Strab. p. 364; Conon 36; Paus. 3.2.6.) The tale ran, that the inhabitants of Amyclae had been so often alarmed by false reports of the approach of the enemy, that they passed a law that no one should mention the subject; and accordingly, when the Spartans at last came, and no one dared to announce their approach, “Amyclae perished through silence:” hence arose the proverb “Amyclis ipsis taciturnior”. (Serv. ad Virg. Aen. 10.564.) After its capture by the Lacedaemonians Amyclae became a village, and was only memorable by the festival of the Hyacinthia celebrated at the place annually, and by the temple and colossal statue of Apollo, who was hence called Amyclaeus.³

We wait for the Easter Lilies at Jam Tree Gully, and they are a common sight (if not quite “naturalised” around houses, or where houses once were, throughout the wheatbelt.); being from the Western Cape of South Africa en-route to Australia during the days of ship travel, they join many other migrant species of plant here. The Latin “Belladonna” is for “beautiful woman” and the ‘Amaryllis’ is from the Greek of Theocritus’s (‘amarysso’ — to sparkle) and the Latin

of Virgil’s *Eclogues*.³ Randolph Stow’s “late” poem is both a pure pastoral and an ironising of the necessity to position the cultivated or at least the harvested (picked, displayed in a room to embellish or enrich) as “pastoral”. The positions of the observer and observed, the players and interlocutors through the traditions of pastoral dialogue, location of performance, and allegory of a real condition in the context of another real condition, are in play in this poem as a form of domesticated *deus ex machina*. The foreboding in the “trivial”, the laden “pollen”, the question of self-knowledge and awareness of fate — all are conscious “devices” in the fluidity of a still-life, a set piece. They are “stillness moving”.

The distance between reader and the “stilled” action of the poem, its mode of presentation, its framing of history and interaction between players, make it an uncanny version of we might term a *preparatio culpa*. In the plane/plain of the poem — in the room where spatiality is measured by two watches almost silently conversing (echo-sounding — or reading blips on their mirror radars) the decorative lilies — brazen pink on their long thick-veined stalks — register the sounds, the emissions, the dimensions of the room and what is happening within it. It is a visual-aural register of the now, and of history and its recording as anecdote, making literature — ‘Amyclis ipsis taciturnior’ (see quote above).

We read in an essay by scholar Charles Lock:

Distance is, in pastoral, figured spatially as well as temporally. Where Greek pastoral located itself in distant Sicily, Latin pastoral (above all, Virgil) would translate the ideal world to Arcadia. Panofsky, in his famous analysis of the Latin motto “Et in Arcadia ego”, points out that for the Greeks Arcadia is an ordinary sort of place, and that it takes distance and

the Latin language to give that name the lush and dreamy resonance that it still retains for us: Virgil ... transformed two realities [Arcadia and Sicily] into one Utopia, a realm sufficiently remote from Roman everyday life to defy realistic interpretation (the very names of the characters as well as of the plants and animals suggest an unreal, far-off atmosphere when the Greek words occur in the context of Latin verse) . . . 4

Lock argues, “Pastoral and counter-pastoral are hardly to be told apart. Like utopia and dystopia, the pairing is not antithetical but, rather, bifocal: a question of blinking, a second glance”,⁵ and in essence, he is correct. An anti-pastoral might self-determine, but by definition requires an idyll to argue against. But really, what many ecopoets are wittingly or unwittingly doing is attempting to de-pastoralise discourse on the natural world by repositioning their creative and critical voices vis-à-vis the rurality they can’t get around (organic or industrial) in terms of eating for survival, never mind value-added sustenance which is leisure and pleasure. Pastoral has an in-built critique of anything but a perfect world (*retro*-“Arcadia” via Sicily or Rome) for human habitation, and its need for an idyll is because things are always far from an idyll, so it’s no surprise with changes to a rural world in, say, England (enclosure, the early effluvia of industrialisation, movement of populace to the city), that the agonies of rural life will become metatextual — entertainment is one thing, but an intellectual trade in awareness need go hand in hand. The arising of a lit-crit *culturality* necessitates both beauty and awareness, so the lack of human equality, the pain of starvation, the squalid, will arise with the ideal manifestations of humans-in-nature. But the radical shift comes with an awareness of how both human leisure (more so) and human suffering (different) can damage and inflict only suffering (never leisure) on the “natural” world. That’s where

the pastoral implodes, and we might call that a true counter-pastoral that doesn’t make for a binary or a balancing act or two parts of the whole, but something different. And we can rename it as “anti-pastoral”, but this is semantics. Really, we are undoing pastoral as a way of talking of the rural, the natural, and the idyllic.

Lock notes, “In pastoral – and in literature generally – all that we ‘recognise’ from our quotidian experience is framed by the conventions, and placed in a separate sphere.”⁶ And also, “Separation by frame is also the condition of that response which, according to Aristotle, enables us to enjoy the representation of what would otherwise give pain.”⁷ He is right in this, but I personally have no interest in the reader’s enjoyment. What concerns me is the need for a pastoral to reconfigure how we “read” and then critique our own position as users of rurality, to be able to position ourselves as consumers of literature “about” that rurality (real or unreal). It’s about land usage. We have to critique our own positions as consumers, as well as that of the writer/artist/musician. As with the “Grecian urn”, what was idealised once in the form of art, becomes a remonstrance with the brevity and instant loss of the *now*, which becomes a perverse irony in its reference and recycling in the art of now — the poem that captures and comments and then will be read by a future undergoing the same crisis of a lost past. A past which has contained as much mixed fortune as the *now*. This is the paradox of the “Cold pastoral!”⁸ This is why I question Lock when he says, “And yet, we still like to be seduced by pastoral, even as we appreciate its acknowledgement of our resistance to seduction.”⁹ I reject any “acknowledgement” of this “like” as a sop and resist its seduction. It can be a fiery place, the pastoral, and we need to contemplate our role in its perpetuation (especially if we follow Lock via Bailey as it being “all” literature in one way or another). With his exquisite (taste!) sense of irony, Lock notes, “Pastoral

is the name of the frame: of the threshold over which we are enticed, in front of which we stop, hesitating to pass by, but into which we cannot (for fear of kitsch) permit ourselves to step in empathy”¹⁰, but as we look at the pastoral painting on the curated wall, we need to lift ourselves into the cleared fields of the poisoned paddocks and take action.

Under these conditions, and with a determination to refuse enjoyment and to reconsider the frame of the page, I approach Marc Atkins’s and Rod Mengham’s devastating collaboration — photographs and text are what it is and is not — published by Veer in a landscape-format book in 2014. As Michel Delville says in his astute micro-essay “Foreword”, “*STILL Moving* appeals to the five senses and beyond.” This is a book of gothixellation, of prophetic and preter-apocalyptic synaesthesia — here is the odour of sight, as there is here where I write, with those flowering bulbs we call Easter Lilies, Amaryllis Belladonna,¹¹ long gone with a southern wheatbelt winter, but the memories of the singular profusion still redolent. This is a work of clinical observation with blurred aftertastes. Delville notes, “The focus is on confrontation rather than juxtaposition, whether between structures and variables, motion and stasis, words and images, depths and surfaces, inside and outside, or reflection and speculation.”

The flowering of the Easter Lilies here was when my copy of the book arrived and sat and gestated. Farmers are replacing their sheep with cows. Cows are more profitable (now). Mines are opening up in the rural zones. A bucolic is setting a frame for consumption of the item arrived as mail in a jet aircraft. And thus with Stow’s poem of the absence of presence in mind, the ironic structures of pastoral tradition to allegorise any interaction — platonic, passionate, indifferent, circumstantial, strained, longed for — in mind, I read

the book. I have a process. I will go through (it).

I no longer *believe* in surfaces. It's not just that they are a lie behind which to hide catastrophe, but that they don't exist. And never have. Whatever the intent behind the Atkins-Mengham collaboration, *STILL Moving*, it is this work of surface texture and textual investigation that has hoisted me over the line in coming to this conclusion. On the page is not the image. The image (and the text) are in spite of the page, but not a spite of the page. A negotiation, sure, but not about the reality, or not of surfaces.

What is made is not a surface. But there is making. It is claimed, there is evidence, and there are the residues of being exposed to making. But my not believing in surfaces is not a privileging of "depth". Rather, we are eternally inside the conditions of production. We can only imagine externals, surfaces, the depth by which we are subsumed. Russian dolls: the celestial sphere holding the performative space — a pastoral sphere.

In first approaching this Veer Books manifestation of the work, of the work of making, I use the "flick" method I used when making cartoons in the corners of my exercise books at school. I watch the figure run through a history of the moment. Later, I read Atkins say in his "A Word from the Makers", "words pinned through a cartoon", and Rod Mengham evoke, "Words on the air with no frame". Dungeness nuclear reactor on its "sand and shingle" is a pressing image, *with an eye* for the care of "cattle" who will feel its effects before they are killed and served up on plates. The maddest cows. Through the air and through other media the radiation, and the surfaces that would absorb or deflect not doing their job, other surfaces porous in so many different ways, the images seep through, and the pictures are always past. In the Marvel comic, in the holding up on super-8 film to see each frame —

some damaged — I take the storyboard plate by plate towards its denouement. I hide, watching, behind *my* "cloak of invisibility". Mengham knows — "There are traces of heat in the air through which memories pass." And those memories are altered by the presence, so many mirrors bouncing them back and forth they are lost. "In the cubism of the dismantled lighthouse". For you see, the efficacies of art are our marking time as well. Can one be anything but formalist and nihilist at once before the architecture of the nuclear power station? It belongs to no era in its utility, its attachment to the concrete and steel work of a particular time, government, company, factory specialising in . . . France. Across the channel, the routes of the nuclear industry. Trains and trucks. All those ties, all those routes to "constructivism of a shallow grave". He said it earlier, slightly earlier — the paragraph, the stanza before: "In the suprematism of a highway, joining the dots in a history of the Richter scale." Threat? Urban wanderings to the "End", as Atkins shows us — responds but not to tell us. These frames. How safe? Melange of populace or specificity of the hazed gaze? That was the urban bucolic. Theocritus looked to his home, Sicily, for his Arcadia. Arcadia for Virgil was, well, Arcadia. In Greece Arcadia is the ground broken by hooves. The crags. The heat. In the fields. Back in the fields. The naming: "the stars come out on the Great Hungarian Plain, and Orion's belt acquires a notch". We assume a travelling, but maybe not. "as I live and breathe" but to break in, what do we breathe? Those rails — the armaments, the makers of genocide, the power-brokers of economy, the nuclear waste going to . . . the stars, the Zone, the illumination or glow looking in on itself, its own production — Melpomene far-looking, pensive/reflective and *steely* — what internal lights show through filters, lens, chemiluminescence — the grain of curves and the rails preventing centrifugal catastrophe. The book itself is centripetal? Why? The images accruing and axons

will take me there when I dream: and this is not lush, any more than allegory in Virgil's *Eclogues*, the fear and obsession with the God-emperor, the loss of estates and who gets what in the redistribution. But that was not Zimbabwe. The southern lands. Here, where I wrote to you, images and text . . . from. Which tunnel supplies us with roof flowers? Which texts denote the category of rectangle, the golden mean? As perspective is limitless in the curve, the tunnel takes us back to our beginning, though light at the end is not a spiral; it is a violent welcoming. You will emerge; others have. To toll or be told, to be marked in the crossing. There never was a liminal. We reject it: you can't escape this. They will force you out of the tunnel in the end. Just hesitate, you can do that. So, as Meliboeus says, "nos patriam fugimus: tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra/ formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silva"¹² . . . and what a cheek of the privileged, what a rubbing-it-in, for Tityrus to come back with:

O Meliboee, dues nobis haec otia fecit.
namque erit ille mihi semper dues, illius aram
saepe tener nostris ab ovilibus imbuet agnus.
ille meas errare boves, ut cernis, et ipsum
ludere quae vellem calamo permisit agresti.¹³

which is not to deny the beauty under the blanket, the starlight in the lines of concrete, the window mirror statements, the textures if we look, the splendour in what is lost — taken — the clouds prophetic over the place of records, of servers — the two-thirds rule the strike from an orbiting fleet of more advanced beings with weaponry we could never envisage . . . and bricks, which we cling to, from their scooping and baking and the piling up. "3 SOUNDING POLE". Before encountering this 'deeply', I will consider that Mengham's poetry and essays have always had elements, at least, of the subterranean, of the snake escaped from paradise. Of burrowing and looking into

the forbidden. And then there are details: labels, signs, conjectures on encounter. Certainty and questioning can be in the same word — but always knowledge, always information flowing in through the gaps caused by movement. What do we know, let's sound it out, let's apply the tuning fork to the resonating box, the white box on which we might check our images: "no Falernian wine to mend your fortunes / no chance of promotion to the fleet at Ravenna". Where, the centres of empire? Wherefore "a door opened and closed", and what of the qualities of light, the concentration of comparatives, the application of (false) binaries? We of the "incomprehensible crowds". Water carries the song of the blue whale for over 1000 miles (I cite Tim's project on blue whales). Light reflected back can burn on a cold day. And the shore shifts and not only as the levels rise. What we know of living proof, of data we take with us into breakdown. A loss, absolutely. Don't doubt it. We read: "The lights get carried away to the burying-ground by the harbour, where a necrotising linctus covers the eye. Off to the right, Seurat's bathers gradually depixelated." We see: the materials of the made in the framing, the making in the binding of pixels, the pointillisms rendered to their fluid moment. This is no trick of light, no parsing of surface: where brightest and most full on the spectrum we realise lightlessness. This is illumination, a burial in dark matter, in the spaces between perception. The Arcadia resting-place sings us — rough ground, burning hot, an ambush as quiet as a whisper when we've stopped mentioning the risk. Aggregated to the rising seas, acclimatised to the change. Loss in the cut eye, the *Un Chien Andalou* moment that is not gendered, but we see the cut of a woman, her silhouette. Who is speaking with whom? In the history of the modern pastoral is the argument of cinema: the moving stills, as every moment claims its point. Polarised, what we see are harmonics, the waves making sound. Whose song is whose? In the prism, the green strand. The plucked-

from-the-poisoned-rainbow revelation. Thyrsis says, in Eclogue VIII:

Aret ager, vitio moriens sitit aëris herba,
Liber pampineas invidit collibus umbras:
Phyllidas adventu nostrae nemus omne virebit,
Iuppiter et laeto descendet plurimus imbri.¹⁴

But the collation of signatures offers solutions: strange, uncanny, grotesque, weird, outlandish, off-beam, peripheral solutions. We read: "There is nothing more strange than a signpost blown out to sea, drifting anywhere on the face of the waters." On the face of an ontology: the mists of Merlin, the crisis of the Grail, a betrayal of Camelot itself by its constituent parts, its audience: the viewers? The Dragon's Breath? "The mist of breath on a mirror passes away with the first word." In the Beginning. "So they talked to him freely, listening to their tales of men calling to a Maker, but with no hope of ever understanding." This epic crossing, this navigation. In equipping the expedition, the argosy of exhibition, the storehouse of tales and their images. Bachelard says a lot of so-what, but he also says, "When I was sick my father would light a fire in my room."¹⁵ I am here too, placing a mirror to the quiet, cold lips of pastoral, waiting for breath to mark it. The lenses of my eyes are thin, and thinning. It is difficult to retain the seeing contents. Become masters of our hearths, of our eyes. That's the translation. Don't fear. So much pleasure under the man-God's eye, these performances of the rural, these conquests of the soul of Greece? But not here, not in Mengham's and Atkins's defibrillating pastorals which open the hands to release the images: they are aspirations, they are not enclosures. We do not have to remain trapped in the traps. The ash tree of M. R. James, outside "rather dank little buildings". Be wary. The possessions of the lone tree, the forlorn, the forest agitating in the blanks.¹⁶ Ever the stately home or country manner in disrepair.¹⁷

That smothering cloud, that breaking of meniscus. The unbalancing tomb as we allow US ALL to emerge, what we most fear. Anxiety and anticipation. The ghost bird-planes, the flotilla coming in late, those walks I take with thyroxine at dangerous levels bursting out of my gland. The light is that, in the tales. Cautionary. Nightfall. And the wavecall.

"WHERE SUNS LIE" in a sixth part — sharp and bold incipient catastrophe images, which caught me in my bucolic cartoon flickery. Sizewell B will echo. Dungeness is the Springwatch BBC programme I viewed at Rosewood Cottage in Schull, Country Cork — collectively intruding — the English awakening, were there eagles around the power station? Smew activities in radiation penumbra? Or the collection of poems by the film-maker, obit., I am sent by his anthologist, his films and isolation and correlation of body event, and "decline", in the shadows of the power station. I will read: "The British nuclear industry is built on sand / and shingle banks." I will count the polishes of sea connecting and the waders picking amidst the structures offshore, "The insatiable logic of nuclear architecture": now they're becoming one, the *Maker* and the *Maker*: a fearsome becoming. They see their consumption, the light of development (the computer light coming out at them, this familiarised exposure), and a meeting is held, a quiet collaborative spectacular of makers and viewers, all, one and all, listening to the goatherds sing *The Society of the Spectacle*. I read Debord (how much light shone on the page?): "The image of the blissful unification of society . . ." ¹⁸ And always the sun, the power of the sun, as I sit here amidst my drafts of sun poems, and think about the poem of Randolph Stow's in which the "Easter Lilies" fill the room with the breakdown of tradition, as tradition never was. Just scaffold, like patronage, for that is pastoral and that is why *STILL Moving* is aching with pastoral reproduction but is never-pastoral. If

everything in literature is pastoral, this is unliterature and not photography. I will return to the sun and my disquisitions against “place”. I will, even “down here” where the mines bud into mines, and the first step on the nuclear train is taken (no metaphors mix), and the enriching plant at Capenhurst (Urenco) and the ponds at Malvésí and the sacred land of Leonora, O sacred lands all sacred lands,

Danger
from windborne particles
contamination through
inhalation 19

Yes, now I read — the facts. “6 metres a year”. Now. When the font was applied. 2097 decommissioning “complete”. Yes, yes, it was Derek Jarman. Sophie sent me his poems. And the art. The art of shingle. Razors — mine always blunt on my chin, which is older and the bristles are white, wiry. Hemisphere crystal ball egg — “Dorian nightingale”/“herald”/labouring God. *Pierians*.20 On the shell, such a sheen — try getting the shutter speed spot-on, the point and retain of shadow, stark blocks. As if it were beauty against facts. X-rated. What evidence have I supplied? Of pastoral, of surfaces? Do I have to come back in *STILL Moving?* Do I expose or supplant or expect an archaeology? Hereabouts, it is funded by petro-chemical companies. Chevron is big in the investment of petroglyphs. Matthew Arnold responds in “Below the Surface-Stream”:21

Below the surface-stream, shallow and light,
Of what we say we feel — below the stream,
As light, of what we think we feel — there flows
With noiseless current strong, obscure and deep,
The central stream of what we feel indeed.

We take unto ourselves the colonial history, the

patterns of teaching. Tim is homeschooled in wheatbelt Western Australia. Latin. Or the scroll-books in English, “The Roman Mysteries” series. Dovering — like Hoovering. A vacancy the bullies opened for us, in rightfulness. Arnold, Mengham knows in the room of upwardness, a warped mobility — “a self-haunting reverie”. Yes, “If England is rooted in the imagining of its chalk bulwark, then England is chimerical as a blue bird over the white cliffs.” I’ve seen it, departing the shores. Areva (via EDF) barely touched by Channel storms. Underways, overpass of particles both ways: swirl in such pristine, sharp images of now-as-history. To stretch a panorama is to make more of the picnic under fallout skies. A fence is a ledge. The roots of weaponry: defence/offence and then lips and failing teeth and the dentures of thumbnails. The frames are so specific and yet, the text is the teeth on the old film we place through the sprockets of the projector on which my grandfather showed home movies. They are always home movies and always were — the farm brought in doors on the screen that filled the curtained bay window, people moving fast, then slow, then waving awkwardly as the paddocks rolled by. And the industry of the rural continuing underfoot, mise-en-scène, as dust in the air. We breathe and see it all. Atkins and Mengham know this. Theirs is a collaboration appealing to our senses. It is a call to action in which history is not held in check by pastoral reckonings, their digital embodiments, the nuclear-electric hunger for reaction.

¹ Copy of Randolph Stow’s handwritten draft (obtained by John Kinsella from Stow’s sister Helen in 2011).

² From Randolph Stow, *The Land’s Meaning: New Selected Poems*, ed. John Kinsella. Fremantle, Fremantle Press, 2012, 196.

³ *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* illustrated by numerous engravings on wood. William Smith, LLD. London, Walton and Maberly, Upper Gower Street and Ivy Lane,

Paternoster Row; John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1854: www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0064%3Aalphabetic+letter%3DA%3Aentry+group%3D8%3Aentry%3Damylae-geo (accessed July 29).

⁴ Lover, love-object, the “magic” of love, Amaryllis is a polyvalent female in Virgil’s *Eclogues*, whose works are polyamorous, with *Eclogue II* (the “Corydon *Eclogue*” portrays overt homosexuality, presenting *delicias domini*) transfiguring interpretations of love across the entire work. It is essential to consider Stow’s poem in this light.

⁵ Charles Lock, “The Pastoral and the Prophetic: Making an Approach to Geoffrey Hill”, *Salt* 17.1, ed. John Kinsella, Cambridge, 2003, 96.

⁶ Op. cit., 93.

⁷ Op. cit., 100

⁸ Id.

⁹ Op. cit., 94. Lock, talking of Paul Alpers’s landmark *What Is Pastoral* (1996), notes, “Even more oddly, Alpers is constrained to write a 400-page monograph on pastoral without more than a single passing mention of Keats. There is, in Alpers, only silence where Keats is most pertinent: ‘Cold Pastoral!’” See Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn”.

¹⁰ Op. cit., 101

¹¹ Id.

¹² They have a different local name in the UK, which makes Randolph Stow’s referencing of them as “Easter Lilies” all the more devastating re dislocations of place in the performative space of the pastoral: he had not returned to Australia for many years and his association of Amaryllis Belladonna with that name perhaps reflects the years of his growing up rather than the decades of later life, whatever the locale of the poem.

¹³ Virgil, “*Eclogae I*”, in *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1-6*. Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, London, 1999, 24.

¹⁴ Tityrus has spent a life enslaved (it might be conjectured) and Meliboeus has had his land taken. The “privilege” has shifted and we might ask if it’s with sincerity and irony (imported by us? do we have a choice but to do so?) that Tityrus offers the warmth of the rural hearth, his hearth, his reward for his grey hairs, to the exiled (in essence) Meliboeus. This is the inbuilt contaminant of the pastoral and the obvious niche in which the poisons will pour and violate the seemingly immutable “gifts” of “nature” in the ruralised/cyclical engagement between “civilisation” and the “state of nature”.

¹⁵ Op. cit., 24







SOPHIE GILMARTIN

The Light from Other Suns

“The motor’s come to stay,” he answered. “One must get about. There’s a pretty church - oh, you aren’t sharp enough. Well, look out, if the road worries you - right outward at the scenery.”

She looked at the scenery. It heaved and merged like porridge. Presently it congealed. They had arrived.

E.M. Forster’s fleeting, speeding view of the scenery from a car window in his 1910 novel *Howards End* is hard to connect with now, unless perhaps one is suffering from motion sickness (hence the congealed porridge). We are inured to distraction by faces, houses and glimpses of scenery that we pass by too fast. Marc Atkins’ photographs and stills from his films offer to us those fragments seen from the train or car window, but in doing so unmake the familiarity of the blur. There is that “pretty church”, the winter tree, the birds — or are they spitfires? — over heathland, in the stills of “Nothing Stranger” in *STILL Moving*. Indeed, those images are framed with pockmarks, scoring and cloudiness so common in nineteenth-century photography, a medium that struggled to accommodate any motion, let alone automotive spin, in its long development time of the negative. Marc’s photography gives us the chance of looking with a long development time, reliant upon sunlight, city lights and what sometimes appears as the light from other suns and other moons.

His images move from the rapid eye movement of randomness and distraction in films such as “Bal” and “Nothing Stranger” (and the beauty of these images brings home the loss of those that we were not quick or sharp enough to catch) to photographs which demand

that we make an aching long and careful search for the human in “Vacant History”. What happened here on these English coasts? A dark spinney floats in the light of a late summer field, but could be yet another uninhabited island, reflecting the larger island that people have suddenly left. The fences they built and the chalk paths they trod, and the indecipherable concrete ruins they made are there, rendering the desolation more frightening. Four cement blocks are moulded into a square cement platform on the edge of an eroded chalk cliff: its only function must be to cling to the cliff-face, waiting for the village mermaids in Paul Delvaux’s 1942 Surrealist painting to follow the street down to the just-glimpsed sea. They will evade the man in the dark suit and bowler hat who walks ahead of them, and will take their seats on the blocks at the cliff edge, sitting for their picnic in perfect geometry, their hands folded sedately in their laps, their fish tails hidden under long skirts.

Marc’s black and white images of the coastline and cliffs near Dover make a demandingly detailed riposte to his fugitive images, but both the transient and the meticulously envisaged works make us see anew how absent-minded and partial we are. The Dover images are negatives of the intensely-coloured Pre-Raphaelite paintings of coastal landscapes: one thinks of William Holman Hunt’s “Our English Coasts” (1852) and John William Inchbold’s “Anstey’s Cove” (1853-4). In these paintings, as in Marc’s photographs, everything demands our attention; every piece of scattered chalk, the spent and dry hogweed and dock leaves. We lose perspective in our absorption. But looking up from the botanization of grass and gorse, Delvaux’s village mermaids arrest their picnic to see a dark shadow on the sea. Their faces, like the bleached summer grasses and the white cliffs, blanche at the sight. Marc Atkins’ images are highly-charged with emotion: we cannot be distracted, but must watch, catching our breath, stilled.





MICHAEL HREBENIAK

Unmarked and Lacunae-Haunted: Photographic Memory in the Work of Marc Atkins

Man and world each act on the surface of the other.
— Elaine Scarry, *Resisting Representation*

Some years ago a group of Marc Atkins' photographs appeared in Cambridge, crudely taped to the plate-glass corridors of the English Faculty: a gutless building of aspirational banality authored by market technocrats; its unwieldy spectres — Richards, Leavis, Williams, Prynne, Jacobus — exorcised via wipe-clean surface; the whole wrapped in the same industrial terracotta plates cladding the fascia of *Sports Direct* in the nearby strip-mall. A befitting reconciliation of town and gown.

This was prime Atkins terrain: interstitial space within a city of "global distinction" at post-peak; the University reduced to Brand Cambridge (occult tremour in its name) desperately hawking its ossified cultural capital in the educational debt marketplace. Over two decades across image and text, Marc Atkins has positioned himself in sites licensed and decommissioned, accidental and fugitive, that are shadowed by such given fields of knowledge, networks and practices. His work stands as an antidote to the bloodless architectural hygiene of spatial controls: the perfect spreadsheet of regulated human behaviour inside the nets of deregulated global finance.

Atkins' typical polis is a floating zone, nearing the end of its transition from colonial centre of manufactures and trades to a thematic space of consumerist

spectacle. In London, a continuing source of his fascination, each day brings a new displacement: routine ugliness, brief reflexive despoliations of the common territory, where concealed activities and covert worlds — public influence technologies, oligarchical gangsterism — are seamlessly integrated within the mainstream to cement new aristocracies of power. His images speak through these visible symptoms of what Mark Fisher calls "capitalist realism," which "seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable [having] colonised the dreaming life of the population."¹

Within the resulting fissures of speed, surveillance and worker storage, Atkins records a spectral invisibility haunting the modern organisation of terrain and body alike. These surfaces are materialisations of memory, inscriptions of activity, asserting the subject as a site of constellating pressures connected to a wider world that is saturated in mediations. The photograph is at once of the relic and a production of relic: an attenuated possibility of memorialising both personal loss and the vanished social past; a breach with an infantile and discontinuous present, dissociated from a cultural record materially etched into the environment — what Adorno, with characteristic bleakness, called "the sedimented history of human misery."²

Too much happens beyond the grain of time. Atkins gives us half-way forms reposing in the temporal gaps, lacunae-haunted, simultaneously trace and disappearance. To be continued or imminently lost. Within such force-fields the act of looking is as fragmentary as the images one gazes upon. Subject-object distinctions erode and the subject tears in the space of its own making. Peggy Phelan speaks of such immateriality in terms of the "unmarked," which reveals itself "through the negative, and through disappearance. The active vanishing, a deliberate and

conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility. For the moment, active disappearance usually requires at least some recognition of what and who is not there to be effective."³

The consequence is an aesthetic unworking; the tentative anticipation of a structure yields a performance existing on brink of self-erasure. Built of an uncertain architecture, the relation of the image to its originating circumstance is fluid, precarious and temporary — the "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (Wallace Stevens).⁴ The *Paris and London* series play upon this ebb and flow of recognition and alienation, alongside an elsewhere furnished by the internal gaze of the subjects. The scales of viewing oscillate between the superficially mundane and the minutely patterned. Raymond Williams thought the "pulse" of the city was a "second nature," found "in the physical difference of Stockholm and Florence, Paris and Milan: this identifiable and moving quality: the centre, the activity, the light."⁵ Atkins' city shots carry the queasily vivid imprint of skies crashing into the mental worlds of each subject, as gothically overbearing as they are incidental: the theatrical equivalent of the textural drapes of his *Studio* images through which human forms emerge and recede, rendering them lost, spectral, apocalyptic.

The inhabitants move within diurnal rhythms, inseparable from climate, animals, flora and fauna; being *of* the land's integration with the material and process of physical labour; *of* the threat of disintegration (pollution channelling and waste management; the sanctioned behaviours of class, age and eros). The transience of the event does not preclude immersion. The environment is irreducible to mere context or background for the human drama of consumption. They mark and are marked. In *Journey through a City*, such activity has been

displaced, continues elsewhere. Echoing the work of Patrick Keiller, the spectral quality of the photograph without a focus on people, of unfulfilled anticipation or departed activity, is neither tragic nor euphoric, but evokes a mode of indiscriminate seeing opened to the possibility of chance, of miracle. Attention is everything: to unarrive is to open slight apertures between buildings, a split prism leaking sunlight, gnomonic grids on tarmac, non-instructions on flapping notices, gilded divots thrown up by tyre and worn down by a thousand scuffing boots. Scratch away the absence to expose a phantom polis, of migrant mobs filing through: tinkers, vagabonds, exiles; a tapestry of journeys made to and from this place. Experiential data in pockmarks.

We unarrive at a displacement more notable for what is missing: ritual markers without semiotic reference, split fault-lines, the exchange systems of time. Each site is suspended between the polarities of presence and absence, existing only between these categories. Elsewhere, in places of abandonment, such marking has ended. Enquiries are rebuffed, comprehension an impossibility. A Sinclarian vortex of bad faith, of narrative repudiated. Engagements overlap and veer between the informational, the concrete and the poetic: feral fragments shadowed and woven into a cross-temporal fabric. Half-deleted presences ebb into darkness. City spasms unravel, lives uncommemorated unready to receive them. Scratch at it. No nominated ruin, privileged view. Sign clusters do their job against prompts and resources; pull and push beyond coherence. Sap lacks in the vein.

This is a treatise on method, a material archive of an era's various wills, a materialist hermeneutics of the urban. As a structure of meaning in its historical contexts, the images explore how forms, objects and practices, instantiate and determine the possible

interpretation of inhabited worlds. A city of surfaces in which only some want to remember, or in which the past appears fleetingly, glimpsed as a parodic reference or embedded in a space or a face, a residual pile-up, an exfoliation. Invisibles confers a subliminal memory of life below the surface, of suffering, alienation, rebellion, insurrection — the powerful forces contained in the depths of the city or isolated terrains. Neons dissolve into great skies . . . faint breath of the numinous beyond orders of visibility, of the metropolis. There can be no surface without an underground.

νοσταλγία

Turfed with shadows. Nostalgia — from the Greek *νόστος*, “acute homesickness” — inevitably permeates the production. But nostalgia for what? The panoptical state refuses to notice its own past unless it can be crudely corralled into the saleable narratives of Heritage. Language and land, traces and tracks, paths of *différance* and fraying perturb rather than clarify. They defy verisimilitude and chronological location as fixed spatial coordinates, yielding instead a straggly and serrated relay, a deep excavation that echoes the superimpositions of geology and archaeology. Or perhaps a supplement rather than a representation, for we lack the teleology against which we can measure this new measure. The notion of the photograph as mnemonic of vanishing is hardly new: the alchemising of a subject in the passing of light and shadow through a camera lens, to be fixed upon photosensitive chemical surfaces occurs at the moment rendered immediately past by the very act of its recording. But under Atkins' scrutiny this process is doubly spectral. His images are survivals of events that might never have happened at all: a negative image of memory, non-revelatory, opaque.

Attention is thus given to rupture, to the contingent marks of earth and skin that Atkins carefully etches into his surfaces. Whether it is the oily textures,

scuffed lines and reinscriptions of *Invisibles* or the phantom stains and frustrated transit of *Journey*, Atkins' hand is omnipresent within these desecrations of the social, a series of unsettling acts that overlap photographic genres. His nudes are mutely articulate: a DNA repository that magically fires-up one and a half centuries of photographic figurings of the body. Flesh contours are virtually indistinguishable from their shadows; framing collapses distinctions between material object and its projection, at once material and immaterial.

Such a dialogue fosters reverie. We enter a contested present of multiple temporalities ingrained within all spaces, whether that of land (furrows of erosion, datable entry of invasive species), the built environment (blistered paint against spalled brickwork, corroding window frame) or body (erratic distributions of the gaze, uneven light densities). Flickering practices, desires and collisions are tracked across Atkins' screens: indistinct performances of lives under the waning modernist project and its failing industrial machinery. Identity is processually accrued and assigned continuity only through recollection, a permanent middle without an authority of origins.

The duration of the image is not the linear, causal time encoded by the logic of capital but a tempo of continuous anticipatory and restorative shaping. The chronology of unfettered progress and the floors of common sense give way and we fall headlong into stratigraphy, wherein might arise the possibility of alternative stories and an alternative politics. For as Shelley discovers in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), the “cancelled cycles” of history are in fact “huddled,” “jammed,” and “crushed” in “earth-convulsing” layers that can be reinstated through the poetic imagination. The relationship of the photograph to the past is not that of truth but of desire.

1 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There no Alternative?*
Winchester, Zero, 2009, 8.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor). Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 24.

3 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London and New York, Routledge, 1993, 19.

4 Wallace Stevens, "The Snow Man," in *The Selected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2009, 7.

5 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973, 5.

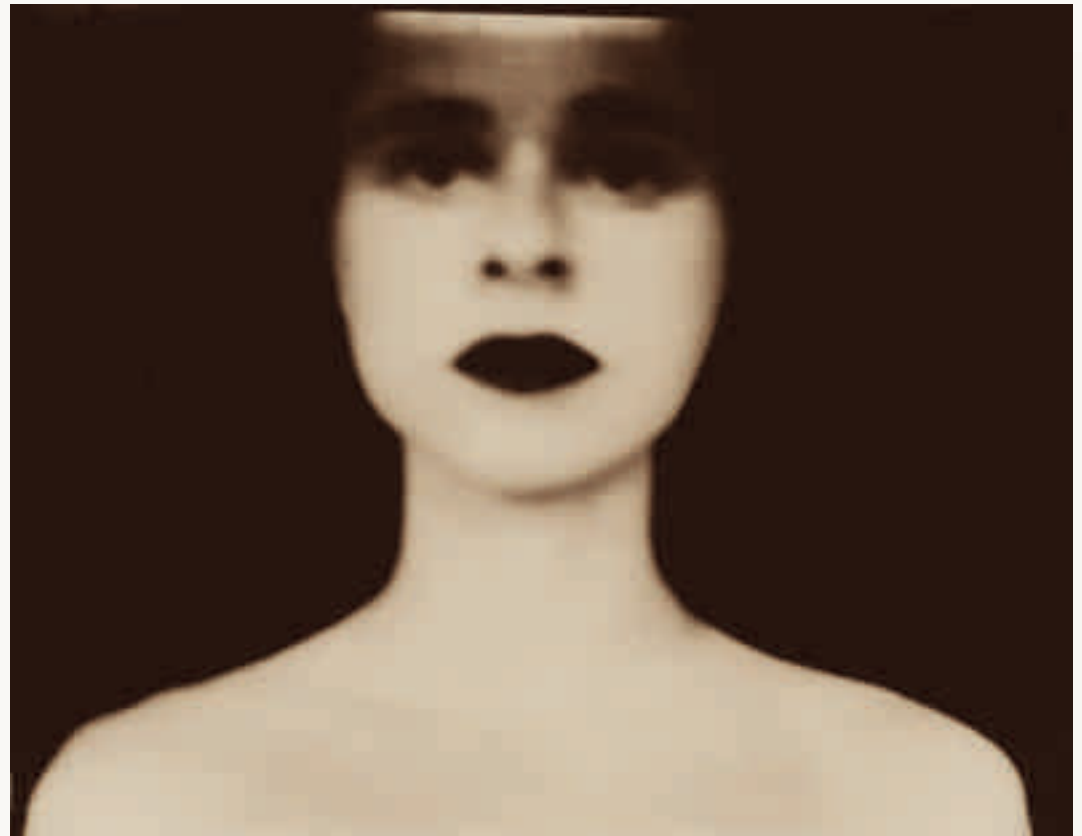




2

PAUL BUCKLEY

The magic of Marc Atkins is that he inhabits a dizzying array of realms, yet manages to bring them all together by coating them in a patina that ties them all together undeniably as a body of continuous work that continues to twist and morph and grow and amaze, his many arms reaching into this area and that in search of the odd and beautiful then pull back to deliver this imagery to us the viewer under his careful curation and vision of the whole. Always gritty, never fussed over, his is a world of pure out of focus emotion, mirroring the raw moments in life we all go through. Marc is a dark mirror presenting to us that which we do not show to others, and often deny even to ourselves.



TADEUSZ PIÓRO

Marc Atkins' Invisible Cities



I met Marc Atkins in 2000 in a bar called Santos. He had come to Warsaw with Rod Mengham, simply to look around while Rod and I discussed a poetry translation project. Atkins' work was unknown to me

then, and all he had with him was a postcard in sepia, showing a young woman, her torso swathed in bandages or some other gauzy fabric, her head inclined and partly invisible. In London several months later, I saw many photographs of this woman, Françoise Lacroix, to whom Marc Atkins is married. It was impossible to tell that they were photographs of the same person, taken within a period of several years. The only thing these avatars of Françoise had in common was an aura of mystery, even more striking than the occasional and somewhat quizzical eroticism of her costumes and poses. Some of these photographs showed only parts of the human figure, hands clasped around knees, for instance, emerging from darkness like fragments of a dream that will not let memory have its way. When I saw the same approach to representation in *Liquid City* it became clear that Atkins had embarked on a major aesthetic and epistemological project, most extensively articulated in his latest book, *Warszawa*.

"We put frames around anything we wish,"¹ Barrett Watten observes in his long poem about ways of seeing and speaking, *Frame*. The obvious question – what gets left out – is visible in many of Marc Atkins' photographs, if we may call darkness a question. What we see looking at a photograph is not what the photographer looked at before deciding what to exclude from his frame. We see what he included, yet in Atkins' case darkness takes up much of the frame's contents and synechdochically points to the unrepresented, that is, to the world exterior to the frame. On another plane, the emotional meanings of darkness may lead to a different question, especially if we are looking at pictures of familiar cityscapes: why did he frame it in just this way, and why can I see so little? When it comes to frames, it's hard to draw boundaries between emotional necessity, aesthetic choice and plain arbitrariness, and even though Atkins' obsessiveness could justify inquiries as to

his intentions, they will have to remain speculative. There is an obsession at work – and worked through, perhaps even worked out – in his photographs, just as there are grand obsessions in Shakespeare's sonnets, or Paul Celan's poems, or Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, the biographical pretexts of which we need not know to feel their power. It is an obsession with invisibility and, as such, it goes against the grain of most received ideas about photography. In the syntax of photography, frames are prerequisites to seeing, to visibility and signification. Atkins introduces a frame within a frame, with the lineaments of the internal one coextensive with the boundary between light and darkness, which is and is not the same as the boundary between the visible and the invisible. Darkness conceals things that we can guess at, or cannot even begin to imagine, but darkness itself is manifestly visible in his pictures. The process of taking a picture involves a moment of blindness, when the shutter's release makes the world go black in its frame, and Atkins finds this paradox sufficiently fascinating to elaborate on it in complex and emotionally meaningful ways. The most fundamental, mechanical aspect of photographic registration becomes in his work a feature of representation: not merely a replay of an optical phenomenon, but a sustained vision of all the paradoxes involved in seeing and representing.

One of Atkins' and Sinclair's aims in *Liquid City* was to document places and structures that would soon vanish. The photographs in this book form a kind of potential cemetery or collection of obituaries avant la lettre. Perhaps the most telling – and moving – one shows William Blake's gravestone, the inscription on which says that the poet's remains are somewhere nearby, but not directly beneath the stone. The photographer's shadow obscures part of the inscription, making it illegible. We, too, are in the dark. When the idea for the book about Warsaw came

about, the same, symbolically conservational aim was at its centre. Atkins would be shown the most obviously moribund places, although everything else he found exciting was fair game. As we walked through the city, day in, day out, during three separate, week-long sessions, the initial impulse to document everything that was on its way to the graveyard of urban development slackened, and a less dutiful, more adventurous approach to the project took hold. During Atkins' third visit we discovered that Santos – the tiny bar where we first met, vis a vis the new Stock Exchange, frequented by frustrated, low-level government officials, petty criminals, retired prostitutes with nicknames such as Les Caves du Vatican and elderly gay men who seemed to be on the most intimate terms with these flirtatious and self-ironic women – is no more. In its place, a fashion boutique, or mobile phone outlet, or sushi emporium should soon open. From inside the bar, Atkins had photographed the neon sign in the window only weeks before it was taken down. Sold at an informal auction to a devotee for about 150 pounds, it was soon bought back by the management on the pretext of Santos' imminent resurrection "somewhere nearby." Do write if you see it in Tokyo, Paranà or Golders Green.

Photographs take up about 80 per cent of *Warszawa*. They are arranged in whimsical, yet strangely congruent cycles, divided by poems or brief prose pieces written by two Warsaw poets, Andrzej Sosnowski and Tadeusz Pióro. Warsaw is a very odd city. Its steady expansion since the 1950s has caused large tracts of arable land, pastures and orchards to become part of the cityscape, challenging some of Raymond Williams' dichotomies. Allotments can be found in the very heart of the city. But there are also numerous, and centrally located, stretches of what can only be called nothing, wastelands, desolate spaces full of litter, or full of nothing. Atkins found them very attractive. Still,

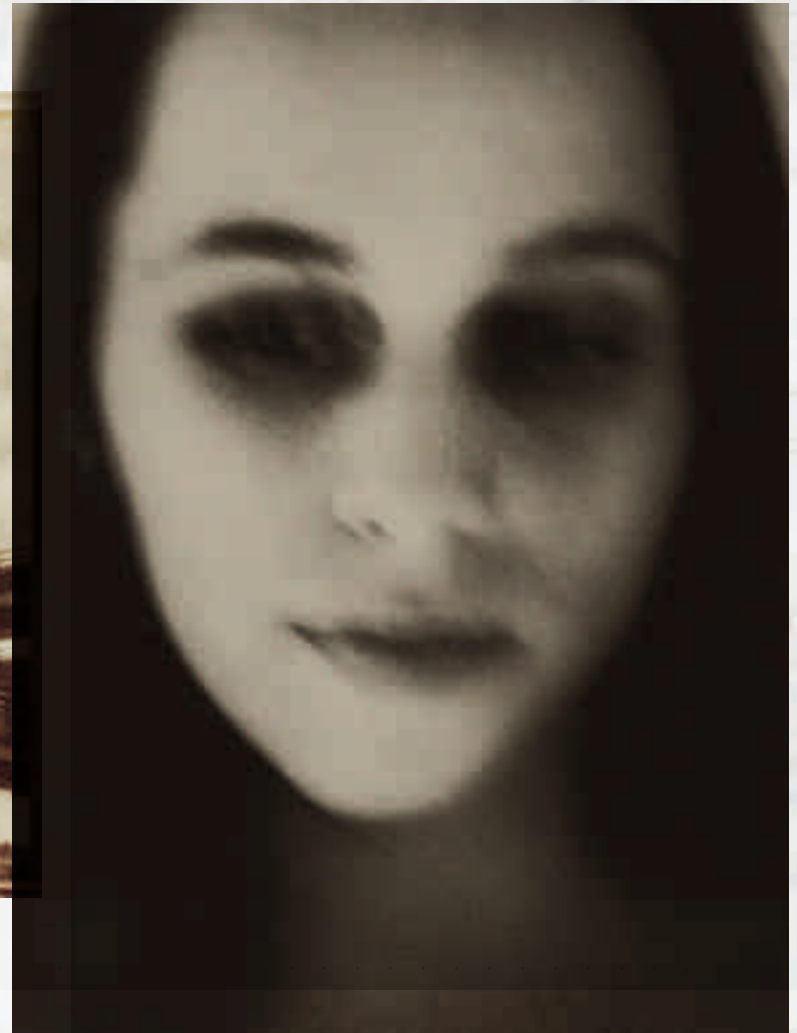
he did not neglect the many "somethings" the city has to offer, framing them carefully or casually, at times shooting from the hip, at others taking what seemed like ages to fix the image exactly as he wanted it.

The photographs in the book are much darker than the original prints. It's good to look at them under a reading lamp, for the darkness then yields images invisible with just overhead lighting or in daylight. Atkins' decision to darken the pictures for book publication came as no surprise: even at its brightest, the city evokes somber reflections and tenebrous feelings. At the book launch, Atkins said that the darkness in the photographs reflects his own emotional state, rather than the real hues of Warsaw. But since so many Warsawians, upon seeing the photographs, say "I know exactly what you mean," "That's how I'd see it, too," and the like, it's clear that his vision of the city is not utterly idiosyncratic.

Marc Atkins has called Warsaw "a place of endless fascination." The same may be said about the photographs in *Warszawa*. My favourite shows a railing on a pedestrian overpass. There are no people in the picture, just the wavering, metal structure which has a beginning, but no visible end. Without fear that I will "look my infant sight away," I stare at it by the hour, and since it's the first photograph in the book, I have never been able to look through the whole album unless I skipped that page. But the omission always causes regret.

1 Barrett Watten, *Frame* (1971-1990). Los Angeles : Sun & Moon, 1997, 260.





Beyond the windows
All the battles raged...

Day Sixteen

Atkins

~~_____~~
CHECKED - 9

to stamp
the book
with the year 1941



ROD MENGHAM

True Longitude: Marc Atkins' Interstices

It is five o'clock in the afternoon, somewhere east, just south of the 52° parallel. The artist has used a nine inch nail to secure a photograph to the wall. Underneath this arrangement is a small metal plaque, defaced by rust. It bears an inscription ending in “—niak”: almost certainly Slavonic. The sun is high in the sky, it casts a long shadow, which is paradoxically the most incised and definite element in the composition. This tendentious sundial is the archetypal photograph—a writing with light. Not by light, but by the artist, although the photograph replaces what the artist saw. His vision is always a fraction of a second out of date, does not coincide with the descent of the shutter and is never actually recorded. The shadow has moved around the nail infinitesimally. The artist has chosen the setting, has placed the elements around one photograph and within another. And the setting forms a commentary, acts as a caption to the idea behind the shot. But just as the inscription is about to name something, to capture what is always on the move, its physical obsolescence suggests the degree to which it is always a misreading. Or rather, this and every photograph is a misinterpretation, since its relationship to the artist's vision is anachronistic. The eye cannot see the difference, cannot measure the sundial's tread, cannot keep pace with the growth of rust. Photography often seems to be an interrogation of space, when it is really asking questions about time. The individual photograph I am describing works with several different temporal scales at once. It also refers to an installation of images at the Poznanski Factory in Lodz, Poland in 2001, which required the viewer to walk across a semi-derelict site, following a trail, experiencing the artworks as a sequence of events in a given period of time. The viewer was to pause wherever

a nail had been driven home, in a secular version of the Stations of the Cross. The repetition of the artist's itinerary was both a convergence and a divergence, spatially and temporally, tracing the walk of a forgotten textile worker, recalling a route followed thousands of times. The artist's intervention in this scenario was a redemption of the mechanical repetitiveness embodied by the factory and its routines; and yet the gesture of redemption was incomplete, fragmentary, subject to interpretation, requiring a supplementary gesture from the viewer. This act of completion, always provisional, always superseded, would take the measure of time elapsing between the different kinds of enactment, worker's, artist's, viewer's, none of which would take priority.

Atkins' current projects are centred on the experience of reenactment. Finished photographs are taken up and inserted into a new composition, but not in a way that restricts their effects to those of spatial arrangements. A completed artistic gesture is rendered incomplete, its meanings given a new fluidity not simply by being staged, located in new surroundings, but also by being included in a process of re-reading, instigated by the artist and modified indefinitely by a succession of viewers coming to the artwork at different moments of time. The fundamental temporal dislocation that this involves is accentuated in frame after frame. The downward glance of a nude model in a photograph whose vertical axis is made horizontal suggests a missed encounter with the initial gaze of the artist. The portrait sits in the corner of a rectangle of sunlight that has already shifted by the time it is incorporated in the new design. At the centre of the composition is an electric cable and a series of power points to be used as darkness falls, the cable leading off to a source of energy and epitomizing the act of syncopation that is at the heart of this work. Its energy derives from a moment that pre-dates the photograph, thought

of as an incident in the gallery, and which post-dates its meanings, the author putting his signature to a transaction whose value will be realised arbitrarily at any given moment, depending on current rates of exchange. Atkins is drawn especially to arteries of communication, rivers, railways, roads, paths, which vary the pace of our engagement with our surroundings. He juxtaposes the accelerations of urban life with the decelerations of its changing fabric, unavoidably subject to processes of decay and deterioration, and to a changing ratio of mutual antagonism between the inorganic and the organic: the flaking of paint and rotting of wood interacting with the spread of mould and the sprouting of weeds. Atkins pushes hard at the limits of the photograph, bringing out the enormous paradox that is represented by the notion of the cinematic 'still'. His photographs are “stills” in the sense that they are excerpts from a larger project that is always under construction, always being remounted. They do not relate to one tempo of participation, but to several; interstitial in their reconfiguring of the place of art in the urban environment, but also, and most importantly, in the way they occupy the intervals between moments of recognition and reimagining. It is on that temporal horizon, where imagination overtakes intellect, that art discovers its true longitude, that measure of difference in which place corresponds to time.

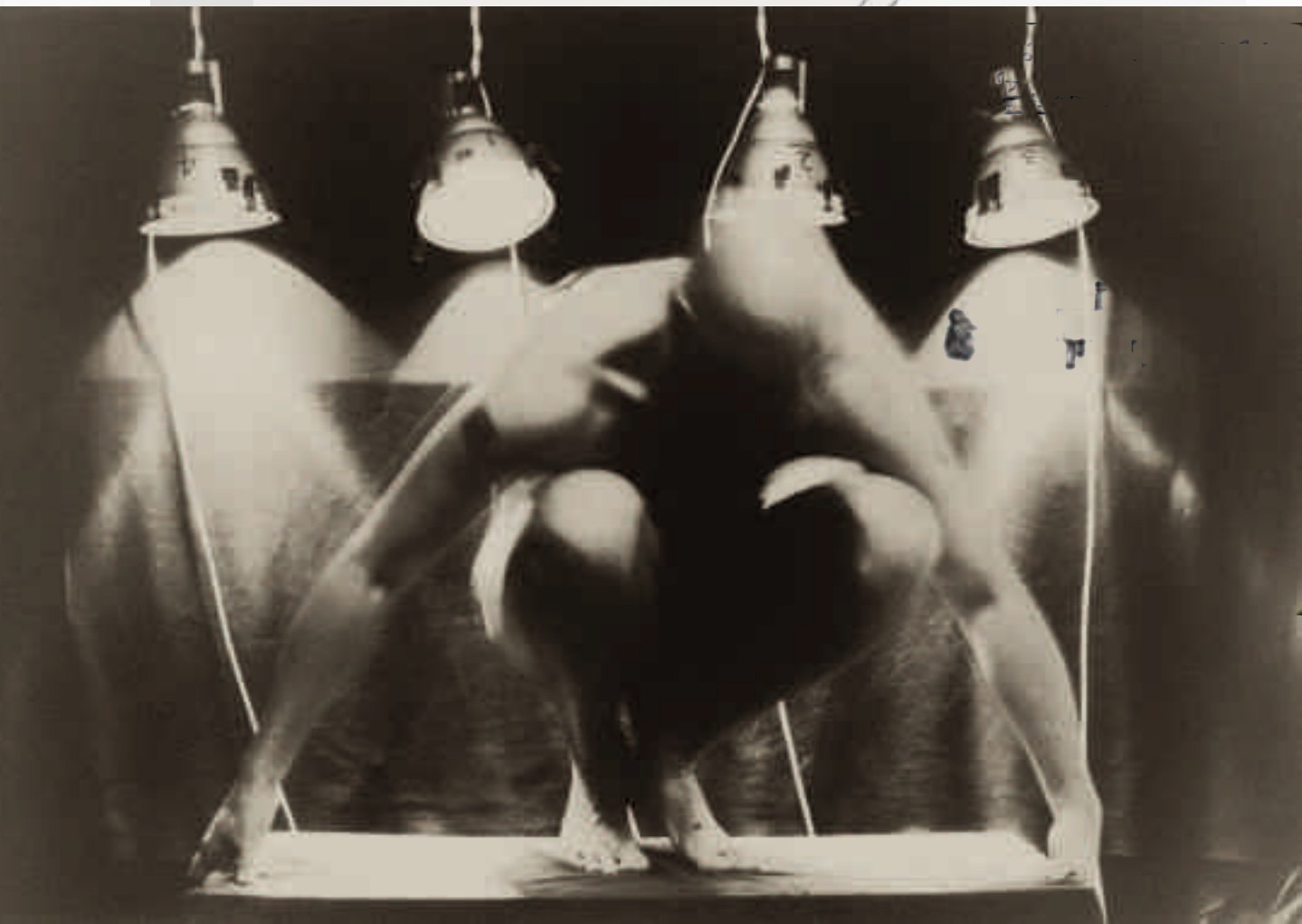


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MARC ATKINS

Calaphon

The crawling lives fall in melodic debris from the shallow cracks which spiral and splinter about the inhibited heads. The sallow skin forming the ground to which dappled bodies fall, spreads between the yellowing teeth and unpolished crania, as words no longer able to drift away poke at the carrion hung beside each bed, here is the once dread boat calm drift, which beats away amongst the seeping posts, melting shadows onto a remote bleached beach, tired by whispers, damp from tedium, perhaps stained tomorrow, these the first words of an uncompelled man, who traced journeys along bridge-less rivers, rebellious river banks, forms of blasted revolution, where cast-off salvaged mirrors film each step beside the fading disbanded notes, while in a more navigable lane of dying greys, those living amongst them, who kick away the heels of perished wanderers, being underground, wait until the caves of Deino, Enyo and Pempfredo reflect again the moving fotos of Paris, grown statues, peasant head boulevards, images of deserted places, games, wars, dysfunction, and those who wait in easily accessible tunnels, who from high, watch night-schools closing with lights left on, and scratched clean, beat once more the echoes, shouting and writhing over ledgers of invisible ink sewn into indivisible seams, where outside the fence each living hour is pulled from the earth by a snapping thread, as neighbours watching through a slit in the over-bricked wall, blow heat across your blackening teeth, as you grind the moment into absurdly smaller moments, an image of previous era skin and pestilential mirrors, reflecting not who but when, have come to know the timid breath in the corner, as each breathes into a hollow room, not over their vacant mirrors, but from the mists of a bile delta, where vast wilds, dismembering architecture, hover in mid-combat above the roofless rooms, an ecstatic, erratic plague of voices, leaking from every joint, wordless, wounded, untrailing, as armies each in turn fall from cliffs of disintegrating books — wait — in the nauseating flow of silence.







NIKKI SANTILLI

Marc Atkins' The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images

Words gather and parade flirtatiously. In their clear, every day vocabulary, they beckon: come through this fragile door; venture in to musty rooms that are appearing and disappearing around your mind's eye; follow strangers, almost voyeuristically — the impression these people make on each other is shadow-based . . .

Accessible vocabulary belies a narrative that knots. His texts tie us up more tightly at each turning word. Charming words, but our journey through them requires more muscle than their evanescence ever suggests. Meanwhile, we spring from one concept to another in playful rhythm, as if across stepping-stones, over an ever-flowing artistic consciousness.

In these ways, we make our way through the longer texts in this collection: drawn onwards by the mysteries, kept at a distance by semantics, all in a dance that travels, leaps about or turns on the spot.

The Logic of the Stairwell intones its shorter prose poems within an established British prose poetry aesthetic. We glimpse familiar aspects from the post-war urban landscape of Roy Fisher's cities to the imagined set of an unrealized performance piece such as Brian Catling's *Written Rooms and Pencilled Crimes*. Grand ancestors of this style make their cameos too: Poe's mysterious rooms, Baudelaire's flâneur.

The shorter prose pieces condense all of these issues to

effect. In these “shorts” and “synopses” single sentences can encapsulate much that Atkins seeks to explain about the narrative eye/I. In “Quiet, This Still Air”,¹ a single sentence evokes a blueprint of his narratives within an editorial observation: “Passing through the dreaming lives of countless people I found comfort in the drifting avidity of souls as I hid in the long shadows of all those irretrievable days.”² The wonderful adjectival phrase, “drifting avidity of souls” catches us in another layer because it introduces the element of passing time and “Quiet, This Still Air” is the title of one of several artist's films by Atkins, together with others in the “synopsis” section. We are “caught” because the corresponding film offers a series of what might be termed “domestic still life” images (black and white, grainy and unsettled by a hand-held camera). There is arguably more awareness of time passing in the text than the film.



Another piece in the synopsis section with a corresponding brief film is “Without”. Just as in “Quiet, This Still Air” the text is included in the film, which is silent.

In quiet trepidity she waits at the outermost bounds of the world. And looking out through the cracks in death's door she watches in de-saturated light the legion of souls.³

The piece meditates on the ends of the earth, life's limits and quality of light. Limit is inherent in each of these fundamental concepts, but the word “without” is both a specific marker of place in relation to a boundary and also denotes utter loss and negation. Equally, for all the show of a narrative, it is not at all clear on which side the subject remains: alive or dead. Does she have a prescience of death with its familiar literary atmosphere of unearthly light? Or is she “looking out” from death to life, where “soul” is still a metonym for she who is only soul? Is “without” here, describing her in relation to place or mortal life?

In the artist's film, the camera is trained on the face of a woman in a darkened room or shelter, shifting to look out between the gaps in a wooden door beyond which we glimpse a country landscape. The woman is watchful in so much darkness, which flows across her face between columns of light, that obscurity indeed becomes the subject. As she moves, light slips down across her forehead, cheek and the slope of her nose, but only momentarily. In this way, the external world that she watches from a distance teases her body, palpably — sculpts and caresses it — occasionally causing it to disappear entirely. In the final section, the camera turns away from the woman to enact her gaze and capture what she could see. The saturated colour drains completely to black and white. The relation between Atkins' films and his prose poems is clearly

one to be unraveled but in this case it enhances the sense the prose poem's suggestion of childhood and the times we learnt about ourselves by hiding, imitating, peering and wondering.

The scene in the prose poem "Without" is characteristic of Atkins' places, which are defined by the eye through light and shade but which treat those limits and edges like musical breaks: marking change but not necessarily an end. We cannot help but smile at the concept of "cracks in death's door" where the line of all lines is, astonishingly, unmaintained. Death's golden era has passed. It is just another abandoned house.

"Without" reappears in other pieces, most notably "Awake in a Room" where the narrator observes his lover through porous barriers whether it be her hair, cracks in the architecture, or the dreams of his sleep. Reading, it is suggested, is like looking at the real world through a horizontal slit — a letterbox view, represented by each printed line of text.

Both the longer and shorter tales in this collection are shadowed by and break against life's losses and disappointments. Just like the pause in a horror film, the artist provides us with a space that we fill with our own fears. In the same way, our narrator does not assume complete control over our mind's eye or over the associations we might make, but simply allows us to make our own contortions around the text to find our peace in resolution or meaning. Thoughts and motives of other people (the characters in each piece) retain a certain mystery. Walking out of a room — an act so dramatic, yet so casually done — is noted from a respectful distance, as in the singular phrase, "the ever tangible moves beyond reach."⁴

Through the playfulness of Atkins' language and

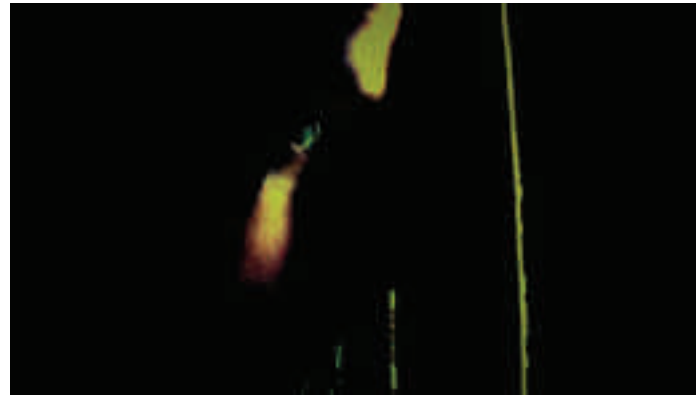
images, we are coaxed beyond the backwash of experience and our lost paradises. Apparently accessible language requires re-reading. Curiosity overwhelms passivity. Against a threateningly heavy backdrop of literary and personal history, Atkins' style of uneven rhythms (in syntax and staging), light our way.

¹ Marc Atkins, *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*. Exeter: Shearsman, 2011, 74.

² Id.

³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.







MICHEL DELVILLE

Pro Tempore

The title of Marc Atkins' 31-minute video, *Pro Tempore* (2010), may carry different meanings. For the art historian, it cannot but point to the essential status of video and experimental film installations as a time-based media or, rather, a media which draws the viewer's attention to the mechanisms of perception of time itself. But for readers and viewers familiar with Atkins' previous works and, in particular, his collaborations with Iain Sinclair — all of which set out to explore the different layers of meaning of London scenery and history — it may also refer to the ephemeral, "ad interim" status of the visions generated by his films and photographs. More specifically, *Pro Tempore* deals with the ever-changing, "liquid"¹ nature of the Kings Cross area as it attempts to retrace the cultural and architectural history and legacy of the district across the centuries.

A quick survey of the major works produced by video artists over the last half a century would reveal a tendency to move away from the manipulation of images and sounds in "real time" to different and increasingly complex editing techniques afforded by the possibilities of digital imaging. In this case, Atkins chooses to layer over two unsynched edits of the same filmed images, one in black and white, the other in colour (the film actually comprises seven layers of film running one on top of the other although only two of the layers make up the principal images). His self-avowed goal is to make the viewer see "images appear in the 'background' as a 'ghost', or as a kind of premonition of the images to come, or perhaps the following images are redolent of the 'real' ghostly image seen first."² This technique constantly re-qualifies and re-contextualises near-similar images and

sequences while ensuring the cultural and psychological consistence of the initial "statements" produced by the footage. As for the viewers, they become trapped in a narrative and historical loop which slowly unfolds throughout the film and leaves them bereft of the freedom to escape from the constraint of visiting and revisiting the same familiar places and hidden corners of the district, discovering new connections and experiencing the city as a network of invisible forces meshed together across space and time.

Pro Tempore thus reactivates the Freudian principle of "retroactivity" and takes us into a realm of potentialities which — in a way not unlike Atkins' recent prose poetry³ — explore the dialectics of perception and memory while blurring accepted boundaries between necessity and chance, order and disorder, the visual and the metaphysical, the essential and the residual. The ghostly presences of the buildings and structures filmed by Atkins delineate a vision of contemporary London which is characterised by a flickering of attention between the image and its possible meanings, some of which are revealed through the help of a spoken commentary which itself duplicates the barely legible (filmed) text that runs through the whole video and whose gradual erasure halfway through the film echoes the erosion of the concrete buildings and scenery. (The regular intrusion of the female commentator ironically alludes to the "looping" rhythm of the audio and audio-visual commentary that has become a constitutive ingredient of the experience of visiting museums, monuments and other tourist attractions worldwide.)

Pro Tempore begins and ends with a view of the clock tower of St Pancras Old Church, which emerges as the epicentre of Atkins' investigations of the historical palimpsest of the Kings Cross area. Other recurrent views include St Pancras New Church (a 19th century

neo-classical building), the Great Northern Hotel located near the station and, of course, St Pancras international train station whose own clock tower also dominates Atkins' disjuncted narrative. These architectural landmarks are emblematic of the main stages of development of Kings Cross from the 4th century AD (St Pancras Old Church is reputedly the oldest Church in Britain, even though what remains of it is mostly a Victorian building) to the Victorian age (which saw the construction of a huge railway extension and a terminus in the 1850s) and on to the current station housing the Eurostar travel centre and more underground connections than any other London station.

The chief missing link unveiled by Atkins between the three eras is the Old St Pancras Graveyard which literally haunts the history of Kings Cross. Like the neighbouring burial area of St Giles in the Fields, the Old St Pancras graveyard suffered from the urban sprawl which reached one of its pre-contemporary apexes with the railway extension built in the mid-19th century. The printed text and the speaker in *Pro Tempore* both refer to a poem by Thomas Hardy called "The Levelled Churchyard":

"O passenger, pray list and catch
Our sighs and piteous groans,
Half stifled in this jumbled patch
Of wrenched memorial stones!

"We late-lamented, resting here,
Are mixed to human jam,
And each to each exclaims in fear,
'I know not which I am!'

The poem points to a period in which Hardy was a student in architecture involved in the removal of the bodies interred in the part of the graveyard which had

to be destroyed in order to make room for the new railway.⁴ The experience of removing the “human jam” of thousands of bodies (the last line of the poem insists on the desecration and the dissolution of the identities of the dead) and dumping it into a pit underneath the new station was so traumatic that Hardy felt the need to address the passengers and urge them to acknowledge and remember the devastation of the graveyard and its surroundings. The only monument that remains of the “late-lamented” displaced corpses is a tree around which some of the removed tombstones were placed and which also makes a number of appearances in Atkins’ video. *Pro Tempore* also contains a number of close shots on some famous tombstones including that of neo-classical architect Sir John Soane and Mary Wollstonecraft. (The film also alludes to her daughter Mary Shelley and explicitly compares the history of displacement and disconnectedness of Kings Cross to the tragic and “homeless” life of the author of *Frankenstein*).⁵

Atkins’ palimpsestic recreation of the cultural history of Kings Cross introduces an intriguing avatar of the revisiting effect of the loop. By superimposing different layers of visual and literary meaning *Pro Tempore* creates a maze of connections between the past and the present, the living and the dead, thereby further literalising the “ghost of repetition” that sneaks in to haunt St Pancras from the early Christian communities to the Victorian Empire and beyond.⁶ This procedure also extends to the film’s soundtrack, which incorporates and redistributes a variety of sounds including burning noises, bird songs and the hissing sounds of cars and trains. In doing so, Atkins’ xenochronic video layers (which are visually punctuated by the overlaying of the images of the sundial and the different clock faces) suggest that what gets explored and questioned in the act of repeating is above all is the nature of difference itself, the difference that, for

instance, separates two identical images by virtue of their clarity or colour tone. In *Pro Tempore* the contrast created by the superimposition of the colour and black and white images is particularly apt to urge the viewer to be active in the production of cultural meaning and historical connections. And, indeed, some of the most arresting moments of the film occur when the black and white and the colour footage (the two “primary layers” of the filmic palimpsest) meet in a single frame. In those superimposed images the circular function of the looping effect operates at a micro-level, one which could be assimilated to a supernatural “visitation” rather than an iterative revisitation.⁷ Other memorable scenes include the ironic appearance of an underground sign in the Old St Pancras Cemetery in a passage that suggests that the ghost of repetition once again returns with a vengeance and reveals the more sinister and disturbing dimensions of *Pro Tempore* which were already prefigured by Hardy’s poem earlier in the film.

All these examples demonstrate that Atkins’ radical critique and deconstruction of the cultural and social myths that have surrounded Kings Cross over the centuries (which include what the speaker impassibly describes as the illusion of an “ideal community” and a “world of leisure and entertainment . . . in one of the most deprived areas of London”) operates at a heightened, unresolved level of consciousness while pointing to a constant folding and unfolding of repetition which results in a radical compression of time and space. In academic circles, my use of the word “fold” is bound to conjure up Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Leibniz and the Baroque, in which the fold is understood as an “operative function” that “[unfurls] all the way to infinity”.⁸ As we know, Deleuze applies this model to the visual arts (the “schizophrenic ‘cramming’” and “all over fold” of the 17th century still life⁹), architecture and sculpture (the “fiery” drapings of Bernini’s Saint Theresa¹⁰), literature (the closing

sections of Leibniz’s own *Théodicée* and its “embedded narratives” and proto-Borgesian forking paths¹¹) and – perhaps less convincingly – in music, in which the vertical, expressive harmony of Leibniz’s “monadic concert” is folded into and “realised” in the verticality of melody.¹²

Rather than pursuing an analogy between the fold and the loop—which is bound to generate conflicting views without necessarily deepening an understanding of each—I would like to end this short essay by drawing attention to the current ways of visualising audio and video recordings afforded by multitrack technology. By going from layer to layer, cut to cut, in order to displace, sample, synch or de-synch segments of each track, digital technology offers us a different way of visualising the process of recording or filming, one which would seem to continue the Baroque project to fold, unfold, twirl and refold segments of composition into each other while creating new vertical and horizontal vectors of meaning. These have as little to do with the palindromic and moebian models considered in the opening sections of this paper as with the more traditional sequential developments of pre-rhizomatic, closed texts. Such compositional methods interrogate the nature of the loop less as a technical device or tour de force than as a mode of representation, a system of knowledge and the site in which a new poetics of attention and memory might emerge. The examples we have looked at show that the loop, despite its resistance to linearly extended narrative,¹³ cannot remove itself from story, history as well as from the multifarious and intricate fabric of myth. In doing so, they suggest that the loop — which is often understood as the apex of the depthless, simulacral strategies that have governed the dominant compositional patterns of post-WWII art — is liable to reinforce the potential for “thickness”, profundity and vertical complexity of video art while foregrounding

the gaps and displacements of contemporary art and experience.¹⁴

¹ The reference is to Atkins' collaboration with Iain Sinclair, *Liquid City*.

² email to the author (October 13, 2010).

³ Marc Atkins, *The Logic of the Stairwell*. Exeter: Shearsman, 2011.

⁴ The poem dates back to 1882, at a time when Hardy resided in Wimborne, Dorset, where he became involved in the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. "*The Leveled Churchyard*" seems to refer more specifically to Wimborne Cathedral, whose restoration Hardy took an active interest in. That said, his experience of the dismantling of the Old St Pancras cemetery twenty years is clearly the original inspiration of the poem.

⁵ The only absent building in Atkins' film is that which gave King's Cross its name: a huge monument topped by a statue of King George IV built in 1835 and demolished ten years later and which housed a police station ... and a camera obscura in its upper level.

⁶ The palimpsestic texture of Atkins' *Pro Tempore* also suggests an alternative to the "problematic denial of depth" identified by Françoise Parfait one of the pillars of video's "phenomenological identity" (Françoise Parfait, Vidéo: un art contemporain. Paris, Editions du regard, 2001, 105). It is to be noted that the thickness conveyed by the vertical links established between the different sequences of *Pro Tempore* contrasts with the smooth, hyperrealist surfaces produced by the great majority of current video artists.

⁷ Once again, the analogy with musical composition springs to mind. One is reminded of Steve Reich's "*It's Gonna Rain*" (1965) in which the composer plays two identical tape loops against themselves until they gradually fell out of synch with each other in a "canonic relationship" (Chris Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*. London, Bloomsbury, 97), opening up avenues of unpredictable relationships and combinations. However, unlike Reich, Viola and many post-Cagean artists, Atkins does not employ chance or predetermined procedures to synchronise or desynchronise the sequences of images.

Instead, the different images and sequences were selected, cut, synched and aligned manually with the help of digital tools.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque*. Paris, Editions de Minuit 1988, 5.

⁹ Ibid., 166.

¹⁰ Ibid., 165.

¹¹ Ibid., 82-83.

¹² Ibid., 186.

¹³ Which it shares with many other models of postmodernist thinking, including Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome or Rosalind Krauss's grid.

¹⁴ The vertical relationships established by computer software geared towards the manipulation of digital imagery, with their superimposed layers of audio and video channels encourage a spatial "vertical" reading of the pieces-in-progress.





Handwritten notes or markings on the left side of the page, possibly a list or checklist.

Handwritten notes or markings at the bottom right of the page, including a large scribble and some smaller marks.



JOCK McFADYEN

I only met Marc Atkins the one time, a random meeting at the Royal Academy when there was a reception to launch a book on his work and I was passing the bar, a happy coincidence. As far as I was concerned his reputation preceded him. Our thread of connection being Iain Sinclair, the Hackney rambler, recorder of underpass roarings and writer of difficult fiction. Sinclair is attracted to people far and wide, curators archivists and dowers as well as image makers such as Atkins and me. We check in from all over the place, Europe, America and Dagenham, probably even Eskimos from the North Pole. Apart from his haunting photographs of familiar locations seen through a mysterious veil of hazy antiquity I had no idea about Marc Atkins, his age, the fact that he is tall, that he is married or that he lives in Dover... it's a rare and good thing these days to know an artist's work and know nothing about him. After all most artists today go to parties to get photographed for the press while their work gets made in factories.

Artists who are subject-led are in a minority nowadays, topography is a dirty word in painting and topographical writing is not Booker material. Fashion photography might be exempt but yomping across Essex landfill to check out a sewage outflow pipe in Thurrock without having signed a contract for a six-part series on Channel Four might be reasonably construed as professional suicide, career indifference or a simple waste of life. But we go where the subject takes us, and Sinclair on these occasions doubles as the advance party and chief scout.

Serendipity. A day or two before the random meeting with Marc Atkins I had bought *Platform* by Michel Houellebecq from St Joseph's Hospice Charity shop

in Mare Street. I usually enjoy Houellebecq's nihilism, his pissed off heroes working in purposeless offices living a life of indifference while forensic sex waits in the wings ... but not this time, I hate abandoning a book but I always look at the back cover to read the puffs before binning them. It was then that I noticed that the semi-naked girl on the cover had been photographed by someone called Mark Atkins, could this be the Marc Atkins I had just met... Marc with a typo? Google showed another side to the wonderful photographer of London gloaming and estuary sludge. These girls are ordinary. Undressing in private rooms their sex is not airbrushed, they're not Cara, Alexa or Sienna and they're not from Philip Green parties in the colour supplement of the Evening Standard with Marc Quinn, Tom Ford and Elton John. But they might be posing in the bedrooms and parlours of small houses along the A13 where the cars parked in the tiny front gardens are painted with filth or fifteenth floor apartments in Beckton or even the Travelodge at the Bluewater overpass.

Sinclair has said that my pictures are shaped like chequebooks or car windscreens and that the estuary landscape is full of thin oblong holes where pieces of the territory have been removed and taken back to my studio in Hackney. The same could be said of Marc Atkins but that doesn't explain his nudes. It doesn't explain my erotic pictures either. Putting aside still life there is only landscape and portrait in pictures. Well we've done the landscape Atkins and me and now there are the occupants. What is a human after all? Limbs digestive system, heart and head, a fleeting thing. Landscape forever and portrait for a captured moment. Why the nude? Well there isn't much time so it has to be sexual, why be interested in anybody in the first place? Go and ask a dog or go and ask Mapplethorpe not me or Atkins. But Marc Atkins has got it right, it's the ordinariness that is exciting. Not Cara, Alexa or Sienna.





↳ large pointing away from central figure

↳ another figure to 'split' camera

small child also comes into circle when central figure ~~there~~ rises to walk away, and looks him back to show and hit her down.

Find gestures in picture - put over ~~any~~ eyes stand, with some up (frowned) turning. Photograph emphasis - not looking through a window with flash.

Child puts photograph on eye of the man - all eye in detail by camera and instead on all windows.

Marginalia - update:

12 figures have traces - to show on central figure - or small, lighter - just to indicate each's (holistic) presence.

Central figure has small rather

wide ~~or~~ frowned eye height to

detect breathing of central figure - (eye ~~was~~ ~~high~~ ~~in~~ ~~eye~~ ~~when~~ ~~with~~ ~~understanding~~)

Person: sitting or standing to one side of circle making a large hole

- looks up at that head in a

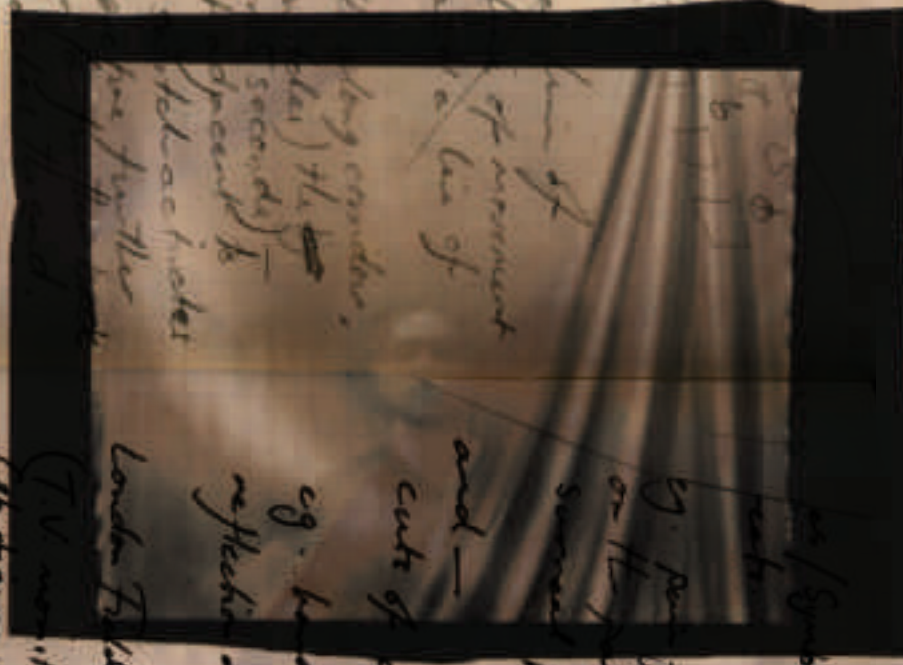
large, loud voice (emphasis) state "BEGIN" all end state "FINISH"

Centre figure holding - to small 'split' camera (head (no eye) & camera) in all 6/5 ~~and~~ another ~~and~~ circle of it.





London with
pictures and a
detache. Swidler
lights.
As 'man' walk
conducting
lights come on (for
but not the light
the sorted. wpt.
a light above
along the computer
on the 'viewer' re



of movement
a line of
long crumple,
seconds) the
seconds) to
place faster
the further

as / Symbols on walking the
cuts

eg. part of this just placed
or the movement (seconds)
some placement of objects

and -
cuts of details.

eg. hand round a pole on the
reflection on curved window frame

London Fields Station - 3

(TV monitor as train comes in)
of figure standing on platform
in front of camera so full in monitor

Tight close-ups of events

MARTIN SOLOTRUK

Marc Atkins / Bratislava

All was supposed to be simple. Marc Atkins accepted an invitation to *Ars Poetica 2014*, an international poetry festival in Bratislava, Slovakia and sent several texts for me to translate into Slovak. It was simple all the way through, the smooth email communication, opening the file, etc. Even reading it once felt kind of easy, too, but, quickly, an eery feeling of strangeness, unprecedented beauty, engulfed me. And took me. Took me in. The first encounter with Marc Atkins' poetry, this poetry, in the capacity of a translator, was like encountering a shadow in the street. It seems kind of ordinary, "normal", you believe you know why it's there, what is it, so you can stay completely rational approaching it, but still . . . That shadow, that strange emanation of Marc's poetry I came to sense, however, turned (in) my mind animated into a film, a series of photographs, or a vast, multilateral painting, though condensed like an apparent near miniature ... but of what? It felt both intimately known as well as alien, like a photo of a planetary surface that remains uncharted, like a face of some unseen creature. The thing is the poems pull us into a space in which the scenery, the setting, the characters or figures stay in a kind of *sfumato*, in an indefinable or at least conventionally undefined space that blends tunes of all kinds of spaces we would expect from our field of experience. The pronouns or "subjects" in these texts are rather just open forms, stripped of usual "civic" identity and acting like mythical figures, except that they are not coined or cited as such, and equally draw readerly expectations of a completely civic, kind of a selfie or a holiday postcard, feel and context. Moreover, the presences stay mute, do not even speak through action, unless action equals phenomena or just being. The contexts, the scenes, come provided in brushstrokes of lines that stick to

their own continuum, syntactical and grammatical patterns, kind of notation that invents its own leaps and gaps to create both smooth, impeccable, but at the same time rupturous and disruptive, nearly atonal, flow of meaning in which the agent and patient often remain unidentifiable, blurred, exchangeable, or at least an open set.

As a translator of poetry, of course, you do not just translate words, you translate logic, patterns of language, images, etc., i.e. meaningful effects of the original. But first you have to see it, grasp it, recognise it, interpret it, and then breathe it so that it becomes a part of your natural flow. Only then can you translate with the grace it deserves and requires. Alas, but here, in Marc's poetry, there is something highly unusual going on. It seems to use, or rather suggest, both deduction and induction and other logics running in parallel, while treating phenomena as subjects, that remain ambivalent, to say the least, as their identity, in the texts' unfolding, is built as something quite nebular, fluidly spherical, rather than traditionally particular. Or, it is even a paradox of the apparent dichotomy, a strangely particular plasmatic identity, if such a notion finds support in literary theory . . . These are plains of abstractions derived from inference of the sensory reality but, subsequently, furthered, coined, by compression to a unique new polysemic reality. Therefore, it invariably invites intuition. Makes it a kind of prerequisite for interpretation. Without intuition, these meaningful traits, linguistically flawless patterns, fail traditional logic as there is no story purely rational mind would be able to infer or conclude as a definitive and definite. It is a story of mind that employs both rational and emotional abstraction. That, while blending discourses, employing several parallel levels and layers of the implied logic, or rather logics, melts them in a pressure of creation to a new unprecedented substance, or fluidum, able to generate

abstract sensations, said with Jung, but only for prepared recipients, of course . . . Those who would be prepared for predicate abstraction and even it failing (relatively, but still) due to presence of modal operators, being possibly irreferential to the particular expected context of the apparently prevailing referential mechanics of the text.

But how is it done? That had to be my translator's primary question. Only after coming to terms with that could I ever try reproducing, i.e. translating the meaningful effects of the original. The creative strategy seems to play very well with the implied expectation of a context of a word, or rather wording on the smallest micro level of meaningful units. The expectation pull being usually directed in more than vector, can be finely brought together into a field or matrix of partial expectations that, if fed at least partially, or just implicitly hinted at, stay alive in and over the process of perception and correlate with all other implied connotations or contexts of expectation in a synthetic or rather polyphonic effect. Added to that, Marc's poetry, it seems to me, also tends to successfully blend the difference between particulars and universals, and forces us to realise any object or subject in these texts is bundled in a way that its projected properties remain hovering between several established classes, i.e. nearly impossible to define as separate distinct entities. As a result, they rather come bundled as abstract concepts supported by strings of other concepts in the universe of inherent subjects that are invoked to meaningful relations, or even participation, while bringing them simultaneously to language-reality objectiontension.

Marc is as if able to paint on emptiness with language, crushing syntax to dust of paints, pigments, not of words, but of hints of micro meaning, showing nuclear force of the implied in the micro sphere of syntax,

opening the space and the perspective beyond and about every word, or rather micro-unit of meaning. His is the opaque clearness, the clear opacity. The paradoxes of the sublime and grotesque embodied into one whole. Citing in and via implied images. Citations turned to natural objects, phenomena. The blurring of a possible code and natural structure alike in encrypting...

These texts make us, our expectation, hover between affirmation and a sense of possible self-deception, which is, however, employed as productive driving force for further explorations of the possibilities of meaningful distillations of experience.

To put it simply, to me, this, the poetic effect and intent here, is, above all, writing inspiring writing...

So here we go...

me dining on the texts in the light of the tradition of écriture, delving into the texts, bathing in their sea of potencies, I set myself to adopt the perspective of within, not that of a narrator or reflecting mind from without, making use of the energy the texts emanate inspiring a meaningful flow, fed by the words, concepts, images and connotations present, or just implied in the texts, which exist as long as they get stirred in the eye of the beholder. Simply to write being inspired by writing.

For this task I decided to use three poems of Marc's Bratislava package, as I found them beautifully correlating together. The poems are cited, one by one, in whole, followed by my flow. That flow, of course is different from the very text of translation like a love phantasy or stream of consciousness is from the very act.

Please, accept the following title and a subtitle for this writing effort that just makes use of a (relevant) citation from Marc's writing itself:

Translator's notes and reflections thereupon

unchanced remark(s), obtained by natural passing, as crowds do, in unashamed word by word gathering

Discouraging Language

Everything is incurable, in unbroken English, all is fettered, by an unchanced remark, obtained by natural passing, as crowds do, in unashamed word by word gathering, although unalien to another's needs, yet to bustle alone unsatisfied, by day by day, when no one screams, and voices turn into voices, like cloud or smoke layers holding at the ceiling, we happy many, gripping at each other's faces, being us in most things, planning our architecture, replanting chronicles, fearsome at other's disinterest.

This does feel like coming in unbroken English, no pidgin indeed, though speaker sought to remain (un) anonymous. The speech welds so many unchanced syntactical fragments, in alchemical effort to distill its version of everything, so often notoriously known for meaning nothing. The title claims. Establishes a point. A tautology. A Sermon of sorts. The point of discouraging in language. Or the point of the very language of discouragement that seeks to discourage us from WHAT? Perhaps from easy arrivals at something, in these texts, that is short of or less than everything that is incurable i.e. would not easily go away or stop propagating like some self sustaining viral presence there is no remedy for, unless our psychosomatics, psychomata would become ready for a comprehensive wholesomeness. This Everything opens with, is given by, a statement of totality that won't just go away, being incurable. Totality which projects its open outreach, a hand, helping and interfering. Giving of sorts, but also taking away and punning while keeping subject

and object in elusive relations, juxtapositions, and pulls of gravity, on a rolling basis. The juxtapositions, mating, in their playful matching games, have a lot of unchanced effort about themselves as they keep pretending they are mere language void of physicality, phenomena, bodily begetting. That would, however, remain unmeasurable, if it was not for their setting up their own experimental environment in which their presence — a nuclear wavelength remarking as if just fleetingly it has always been here — may just appreciate this chance to speak out by mere being here. As usual, it is obtained by natural passing, perhaps, alike logos, also by passing down by the most intimate channels, as well as by the bonfires of the shamanism erupting from the moment of gathering that does indeed yield a lot of unchanced remarks in which we all are, alike words, unalien to another's needs.

Yet bustling in singularity that is never merely private or insular, the actors (words) also feed the teeming potential of the whole game of some wholesomeness. And then there is the haunting of disinterest that would make any game of proliferation by recognition in multi-angular mirroring (of actors) in the fields of inherent charge wither, making them unable to replant any chronicle with any trace of the remarkable everything, with the attention being pulled towards the fearfully expected prodigy, the incurable ignorance of the incomprehensible. Luckily, the incurable can get cured by the very whole some of everything. So that everything rises tall to their feet and chant, in unbroken English, some deep history out of the memory of everything being us in most things.

Two Watching

Beyond the village in tempered fit the two lay sleeping, the collective vision being of a hanging cloud, a stone, waiting to split, to spill even

infection into the ears of dreamers, listening or not, who ready themselves to dine or not on fading reflections, and being at rest in Chronos' lap, as a message to all winters' coming, they yearn to tell of each idiom as it falls, to form a symbol of near stamped perfection, for he is waiting here to be insane, not to write, with an outstretched hand his last word in the snow, and she, to watch herself, wrapped in water, dying of whispers, each held in the disenchantment of their made believe fortress.

Here they are, living in their aura of silence for which ordinary existence seems too loud. Theirs is the untouchable sublime of suggested presence. That air you can just take in. With mere projected particularness engulfing them in a loop of different time, they are born out of a magmatic womb of uncertainty. The elusive mirroring arrives here anchored at the two. A geometry and architecture of the two sets. Juxtaposed. Posed to exposure. Two paradigms of implied expectation. Visible through each other. The apparently hinted pastoral of the village is, by the pivot of the tempered fit, not only awoken to the potential facts of the elements, as if some looming earthquake, of whatever local or even purely intimate kind. Converging upon a pair, or rather a two, the two of a bundle of their shared vision, there is a cloud, a bubble, made hanging, potentially quite ominous, right there, hovers something of a meteor, a stone of Magritte like sorts, but also an elusive nebula of a dream turned into something solid, waiting to split, i.e. thunder, that can equal divine charge of the relation(ship), a catastrophe that is a chronicle of its elemental facts and architectures of natural grace that would spill even infection, i.e. cosmic virus – just to echo the reminder that everything is incurable. But it is also possibly, as we can read, “the even infection”, i.e. infection of being even, single, unassociated, but also outstanding, or one

off, unparalleled. Single and singular and catastrophic in one. Being at rest in Chronos' lap... suggests the pair, the two, being eternal? Ecstatic? Losing individual will? The two subjects lost or found? Or just them turning overwhelmed not only by the atemporal perspective, but by the outbreak of omniscient flow — them in a kind of out of the body experience, in a spasm of divine inspiration that may not be merely privately climactic, but perhaps “turns voices to voices” in a shift from private and human to elemental that is equalled by the flow of some striking sememe dropping from above. Feeling to them precious enough to be captured by the mouth to see how to articulate the divine, orchestrated, spectacle of every detail of a drop being perfect in its individual idiom as it falls either in place, i.e. is meaningful, or falls, i.e. propagates error in spilling infection. It is by the process of watching, of individual perception, that may be mutually irreconcilable, leading to error, that they get separated into different destinies that are one, in a sense, he, waiting here to be insane, not to write, seeking heavenly purity as if being overwhelmed — frozen, with an outstretched hand his last word in the snow, as if bidding farewell to all and her, or just asking for more of the pure heaven that, alas, melts as it dawns upon the world of the bodily, that very same world she bathes in, as heaven melts into deluge. It is her bathing in her own image of herself that makes her drown being engulfed by the element that takes her on the high seas of its making just for her to see the power of whispers coming from beyond the time she thought was hers. The Ophelia-like tragedy of a little hamlet that points to the articulate risks of elements looming within a pastoral, the cosmic emerging via the local, disembodied, picnic feast. The two heroes, unnamed, ephemeral, but true to their intent, and driving force, stay engaged watching their climax to death of certainty in a turn from the voice of a tune of pastoral to the voice of wrath or just forces of different scale in which the sweet and spontaneous

collides, turns into nuclear disenchantment of being held prisoner by the freezing belief in just one cozy side of the sweet flow. We, translators, detectives of the case, however, have no way of knowing what have they been through as they themselves are rather nebulous, not here to write, as it is us, the two watching the two, sharing the story of testing the fire line between the innocent and the ignorant in which some fall, die heroic death, of romantic nature, that pushed and pulled in ways they would not have foreseen before watching themselves turning into a symbol of stamped perfection, mythical citizens at large. The ones who keep asking where is the music, that only meaning here, coming from, what is it if not the words that spring only with potency, being stretched to limits implied by the relation.

Salting the Earth

They are strangers in this land, speaking a language of waves, lying on their backs, hair stroking the shores, forming rocks of sand, under the decomposing wings of striated sky, their burden is to hear the shored armies calling out names, they lap up the blood of passing days, where the fiery lights scream past, it is quietly raining salt across the land, as the earth dissolves beneath passing untended feet, sitting high on the downs' edge they look away, and over their shoulders the sea stills.

Yes, here they come again, but this time wrecked or stranded it seems, travelling in time, shoring up some youthful experience, in their atemporal film of nebulous identities. Strangers, unalien, however. Immersed and immensed in the material moment of the deeper most touch and yet with their mind blown to the expanse of the supra-village sky. Never just here in the point, reduced to the pinpoint, always alien,

greater, different, incongruent, in a recurring wave of arrival. Creatures of the high seas or even distant spaces, mermaids of sorts of the bodies of which we have no detail. Chimeras? Whales? Or just a girl of the kind that lingers by what is empty and desolate is the sea. Yet, though theirs is the loss of will or a tragedy of being wreck, here again, they merge, immerse, become the very landscape themselves, turn (in)to the face of the earth, in the process of dismembering, dissolution, crystallising from the constraints of the individual to the immensities of the seas of uncertainty, fluidity of forms, and willingly perhaps give up their will to turn to open works, to expose themselves to the radius of the heavenly potency, to dissolve to the infinitude of the elements on and of all scales. Alas, they may be possible martyrs of some journey, mission, but anonymous, equal to substances, matter, elements, their bodies of unknown scale turning, in the wind of time, into their tombstones, nameless, a wreck and found object in one, here to be inhabited, but also offering their spirit of a place, having a say in the world of elements, turning voices to voices, while achieving an elemental perspective on the world of humans and their affairs they both invite and foster only to invade and wreck when a twist of nebulous mind strikes without even them ever knowing where from.

It is the discouraging language, language of waves, of the emanation of the world of elements, radiation that melts and hurts the shapes of the world of the room temperature and the system of meanings derived therefrom. The force that imposes its own meaningful field, avoiding the established frames of reference, yet being able to come to grips with the forming rocks of sand. New shapes and forms come arising from the sacrificed bodies of the wrecked and sea-milled meaningful structures.

In this eventful space of colliding, overlapping

universes of meaningful systems, we cannot even tell whether the armies “calling out names” stand for the troops, dead or alive soldiers of history, who happen to march past or scream their shriek of death, or come haunting the shores (of Hamletian mind), or, in a rather figurative sense, stand for the waves of the sea that keeps alluring but also possibly prophesying, while, of course, calling (out) names may mean cursing shout. Just plain bitching as shit happens, a wreck, in this case. Offensive, insulting, abusive language that all means. But, the vector of meaning would be anchored firmly only if we had a clear object in this phrase, an addressee, but we have nothing. Void. So we know not who is insulted or if there is any object of insult or offence here at all or perhaps it is just “talking to the wind” of history or time, cursing the life itself or gods or everything that is incurable, alike a lethally wounded warrior or even a hero who came to save the world and does not swear, just calls out name(s) of the god(s) who did forsake (his not yet apparently divine self). Phrasing “where the fiery lights scream past” also retains ambivalence of the fight in the heat of the battle, a fight for life of the previous line, (“lapping up the blood of passing days”) as it suggests environment of some night operation, ambush, or attack, but also fully supports a line of meaning of cosmic processes, cosmic bangs, collisions and cycles that relate to the meteoric wreck connotation we addressed above. Moreover, we can only easily remind ourselves the battle for survival and fight for life, against the time, is also an everyday strife of all citizens of the earth, who, sometimes, turn to the salt of the earth, happily taking as much as they can, with a pinch of salt, of curse. ... as there is no other way to calm the sea...





LOUIS ARMAND

[equivalents]

EQUVALENCE RELATION. any transitive, symmetric, & reflexive relation, whenever two things x & y are equivalent, or identical (in some narrower sense when expressed by x is the same as y in respect of z) will be an equivalence relation. The important characteristic of equivalence relations is that they divide up (or partition) the class over which they are defined into an overlapping sub-classes. x & y will belong to the same sub-class only if they share the same characteristic z (no element can belong to more than one sub-class in relation to z) → **EQUIVALENT** [epi/lo/AR] 1. (primary) two statements are materially equivalent when they have the same truth value. [symbolically the material equivalence of x & y is expressed by $x \equiv y$ which is used only when x & y have the same truth value. $x \equiv y$ is also the symbolic representation of the functional $f(x, y)$ when f is treated as a truth-functional connective. (If S any P & Q hence as an expression of material equivalence, it is materially equivalent to y (truth) is realized by a many functional compound. The truth-value of that compound will not be altered, hence it is said that y may be substituted by x salva veritate. 2. (broadly) two statements x & y are said to be formally equivalent when they may be deduced from one another. 3. (broadly) two statements x & y are said to be logically equivalent when it is impossible that they should have different truth-values. If x & y are truth functional compounds, this amounts to saying that x & y are exactly equivalent iff $x \equiv y$ is a tautology. ← the validity itself? counting them of truth value of representation (truth value) is a certain effect of similarity & the consideration of the underlying elements of a formalism as revealing actual semantic value without regard for an external concept. → emphasis on the materiality of [visual] language & strict equivalence across semantic structures. **EQUIVALENTS** of which we might speak of the "equivalence" of the semantic surface [picture plane] → absence of any hypothetical regime that would esse / define / realize truth values in the arrangement / containment of semiotic formal elements (the image-within-the-image which is the remaining motif in each of these photographs by re-positioning) the syntax of juxtaposition which articulates by means of a consciousness and hence to statements of relativity: the truth value is a constant which connects itself out, here the photographic "image" is always the whole image - indeed left to be seen - along these semi-logical, left-hand side of the line surface - different - when when the elements appear to represent in a most direct manner, some thing (other some other-thing, or does this elementally evoke it as a thing in itself, or thing for itself, here we perform the image as mark of equivalence in whatever is elaborated as the image, the reduction is tautological. The "image" lies no measuring in / to itself - hence is an inherently contained here - in mechanism of the photographic sight - no does as machine: the equivalence of the image does not reside in its self-semi-form, since indeed it is not for this reason an agent or intelligible (even so-

called critical intelligence): the image x in this sense suggested. It is not a thinking in advance of itself - it is not a concept, there is no "self" which is aware of the relation between the phrase or verbal form—which is the only medium which is taken here. [this completion is not a reduction of substance to an identity of the sign as sign-object; the equivalence which marks the formal or mechanical reproduction is that of a complementarity.] it is in the sense that the image is sure indeed, in that it contains within it the exposure of its own production, so to speak, which is to say that what is exposed, takes the form of a trace of an imaginary event. So that, e.g., there is which leads us to state that in a way that infringes sense, there is the image where we focus again, when dealing with a mirror what is the image in the mirror, the eye which returns to the mirror makes us locate in an imaginary space the object which moreover is somewhere in reality, the real object isn't the object that you see in the mirror, so here there is a statement of consciousness as such [...] that is already enough to raise the question—what is left of the mirror? what, left of light, photography, ... some sort of mechanism in a work that it is in a seminar from 1994 that Jacques-Lacan, reflecting on the technical of the mirror element, assigns a formalist definition: "to the phenomenon of consciousness by means of a metaphor or a particular type of photography, the wall here entails a revealing, however elusive of a certain experience, an ego as witness, saying again, Walter Benjamin's essay on 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' is a work that it is in a seminar from 1994 that Jacques-Lacan, reflecting on the technical of the mirror element, assigns a formalist definition: "to the phenomenon of consciousness by means of a metaphor or a particular type of photography, the wall here entails a revealing, however elusive of a certain experience, an ego as witness, saying again, Walter Benjamin's essay on 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' is a work that it is a precisely the same, we may be led to argue by means of which the form of visual intelligence affects itself (cf. LONDON (THAMES)) a sense or occupation in a hypothetical world in which man has disappeared, there remains only the mechanical form of photography: a camera alone in nature, its form? although we are, of both, the two species, it is self? the camera, while the camera itself is left on the surface of a lake in which there appears an inverted image of a mountain. A despite, as Lacan says, "if I bring things having disappeared, the camera can nevertheless record the image of the mountain in the lake" but he goes further & borders a certain necessary involvement: "we can take things further in the machine were more complicated: a photo-cell focused on the image in the lake [sic] could cause an explosion to take place somehow - i. is always necessary, for something to seem other to x. For an exposure to take place somewhere—& another machine could record the photo or record the energy of this explosion" but there is a slightly different way of looking at this supposing that a piece of the oppositional arrangement of organic & inorganic, with its Rousseauque overtones. There were merely the camera positioned in front of a mirror, assume then did something or other was in vain the course of events described, or began above photo-cell, whether, with an other than the what is left to the other perhaps, after all it will be nothing but an illuminated blind a wall of light, in which the image of the explosion in fact turns the visible & whether this is recorded by some third party or not, it

will have been nothing other than the "consciousness" of an impossible event, in which the ego has still not managed to assume itself. → of what is left in the mirror - an agent or after setting of the described film, which is immediately exposed, "focus" the mirror the film records its own history, becomes unique in the light explosion after effect of the image and into the mechanical record. It is again a matter of having concerned the symbolic relation as being some thing - some thing which things - beyond the surface experience, or disappearance, of relativity. The "mediation" is not, it is based on a semi-logical, of the problem of consciousness, described by J. Lacan (the self is the number that mirror itself) & states (who I do not see a glass that the soul, as soul or consciousness, is the principle of movement, the picture itself, instead consciousness? is linked to something entirely contingent, just as contingent as the surface of a lake in an artificial world." moreover, in "consciousness is about each time" there needs to be a surface on which it, then produced, what is called an image. This surface describes a piece of the structure & the edge of the eye & he claims → as Lacan with several others of the ego is a couple of discourse's mechanical interpretation (discourse or method on part of biological phenomena as substrate, which lives back to its multiple technological of plate & crystals, as objects equilibrium states. The construction of a mechanical model presupposes a very original [...]. The photo-cell image copies the image, & its like is the model of which the natural object is a copy. The camera gets the whole structure, writes to produce something equivalent to the living body that the model for the living machine is that body that, death of mirrors the idea, but the idea is the living body. → Lacan: 1. "the ego can in no way be anything other than an imaginary function, even if of a certain kind, it determines the structure of the ego." 2. "for the human subject to appear, it would be necessary for the machine. In the information it gives, to take account of itself, as one unity among others - a camera built up with the machine in some way 'declares' something to the subject, at the moment when Lacan asserts that there is not the shadow of an eye in the machine, no direct to the subject a recursive equation as the I who is nevertheless up to something in it. But it is the machine - or we might say, as I have seen, cannot not to what is left in the mirror (the eye) part. The machine is the structure detached from the body of the subject. The machine would be the end of the machine" → [DANBRIDGE, an analogue set of devices, the camera draw is left open" showing a black & white photograph of a woman holding a camera. This camera is focused away from the viewer towards the right-hand side of the picture, following the woman's imaginary line of sight. The viewer's gaze is interrupted by the image of a lampshade resting upon over exposure, the lightbulb itself is visible, streaking the top right corner of the picture with black & yellow when on light in the wall, outside of the lamp, an electrical cord winds from the lamp's base, across nearly unexposed carpet, disappearing beneath the door draw at a point directly beneath the photograph of the

The dark in here, even with only
one lamp on.
The extra for classroom and paper will
as if putting into a corner, the corner
will look only at far corner with out
call on for the first to be long
service for
Two business have given in their part
have out they break back or buy
work, extra have done - thought
just want to see
I had had that thingy ever one
room again. For scope.

The one overcoat with apphance
overhanded you eyes.
The shadows, the shadows
investing & don't worry into



and step to the top.
This is not a great, with the light
the will see the and the light
shadows of shadows and shadows

THE WEIGHT OF SHADOWS

371
found the stamp
under the book
beneath the same window



371
found the stamp
under the book
beneath the same window

1000000000



3
I will/want
11-11-11

JONATHAN MONROE

"Between States": Marc Atkins' Poetics of Dislocation and Displacement

"Everything that exists," Max Jacob wrote in the 1916 preface to his book of prose poems, *Le cornet à dés* (*The Dice Cup*), "is situated".¹ Situating itself not just as one literary genre among others, but as a genre, arguably the genre, through which the whole system and hierarchy of modern literary genres might be reframed and called into question. In this sense as the meta-literary genre par excellence, the prose poem is by definition the genre of being, as the title of the penultimate prose poem of Marc Atkins' *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images* has it, "Between States". At once phenomenological and cartographic, metaphysical and geopolitical, personal and political — "Winter. Evening. Somewhere outside the war zone. Understand the stories of the unknown told by the unseen. Laying plans for an eternity of souls. We wait. Watching from the darkness"² — Atkins' prose poems are as resistant to narratological reduction as they are to what he calls, near the beginning of *The Logic of the Stairwell*, "Potted poésie," a "stinking mess of burning money" that "[c]ould be a punishment to the poor."³ In keeping with the prose poem's historical function, as I have described it elsewhere, as "a genre that tests the limits of genre,"⁴ a genre we might also say that "makes visible," in Jacques Rancière's helpful formulation, hierarchical structures at once literary and non-literary, they take as their point of departure a sense that points of departure are themselves never given, that every attempt to situate ourselves, spatially, temporally, historically, linguistically, involves a continual sense of disorientation. Heir to the meticulous attempt to map the coordinates of a single room in Edgar Allan Poe's "Philosophy of Furniture,"

as also to Charles Baudelaire's invitation, in his Preface to the prose poems of *Le Spleen de Paris* (*Paris Spleen*), to "cut wherever we please, I my dreaming, you your manuscript, the reader his reading" rather than be suspended "on the thread of an interminable, superfluous plot,"⁵ Atkins develops the prose poem's oxymoronic, paradoxical potential for exploring the prosaic, quotidian, apparently familiar, yet ultimately Fathomless dimensions of the everyday as something always *yet-to-be-determined* — "Found, as appropriate, a new blank page"⁶ — never really "known" or "knowable." The pervasive gesture of his work is one of constantly situating himself in the absence of coordinates, or with only those deictically precarious, tenuous, make-shift coordinates — cognitive, affective, syntactical — that may be closest, however provisionally, at hand:

Today I remember I looked out across a great plane and saw two umbrous figures walking towards me.⁷

And so found we arrived at the edge of the city dark from the burned forest bruised from a fill of bad literature. . . An exercise in meaning gives that thought never disappears only misplaces to a place where all that has been forgotten finds its way.⁸

In the limbo room the door to the left is always ajar. To the right the window is closed and nail locked. . . The end of the street falls away into the void. And into the void I sink.⁹

Out in the remote valley the road cannot be seen for more than a few yards . . .¹⁰

Unsure of the edge, between a wedged open crack in the still painted tomb . . .¹¹

In the programmatically titled "Passing," Atkins thus

writes of "[t]he world in all its faltering forms," a world that "breaks often with the tide of aeon, and falls when words no longer cut,"¹² and in "Occasional Word," recalling the history and legacy of the prose poem for which Paris is central, now reconfigured and reframed from a displaced female perspective:

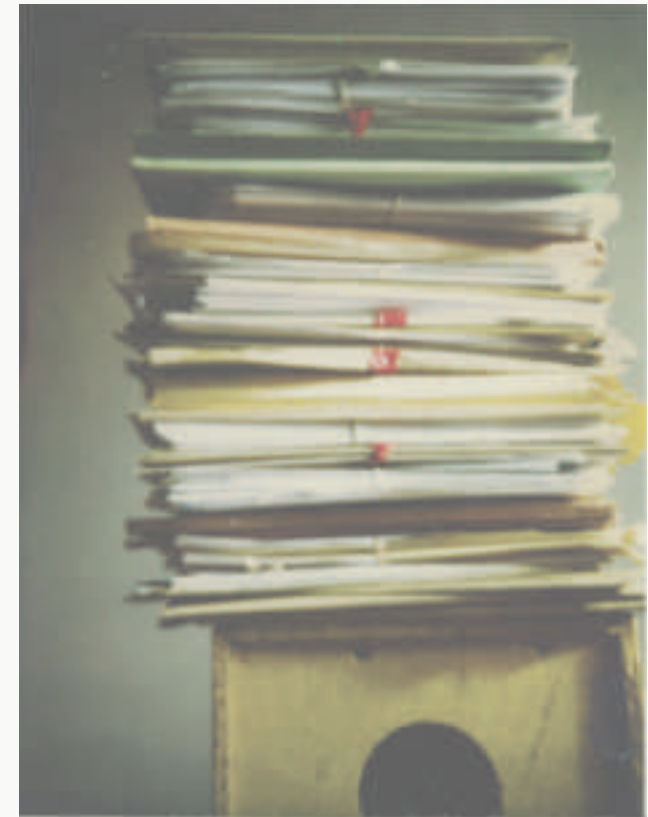
I said, you don't write poetry, it just appears on the page, all these compositions are static, phatic, heart threading, erratic, she then committed suicide by throwing her finished texts out of the attic room window, somewhere in the 13th, her history being, not a path, but a vertical of layers, she said, eating up the images, finding more floors with no access to the previous ones, waiting on the benches in sight of the Seine, in the Journals of Paris, nothing to live for but not wanting to die . . . we grow old and reason we know nothing as there is nothing to know, this video is made unavailable for your protection, to type is to bleed, to wait is to deteriorate, casting a shadow is all, she said.¹³

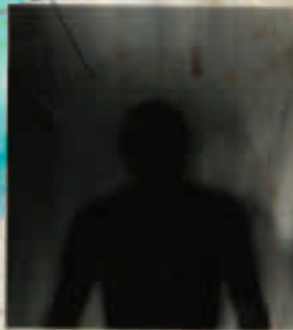
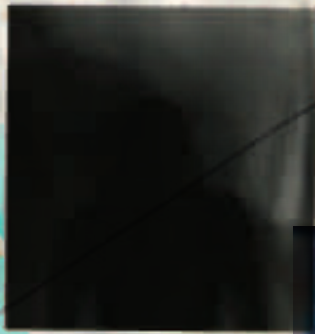
In his recasting and reconfiguring of poetry, in prose, as a "video" involving "not a path, but a vertical of layers . . . eating up the images, finding more floors with no access to the previous ones," Atkins expands the prose poem's web of concerns and frames of reference — like such prose poems from *The Prism Walls* as "Ciné-Roman" and "Distort" — from the intra-literary and interdiscursive to the *intermedial*.

While the prose poem's concern with intermediality is already manifest early on — in Baudelaire in such prose poems from *Paris Spleen* as "Artist's Confiteor," "The Desire to Paint," and "Portraits of Mistresses," continuous with his art criticism from the "Salon of 1845" to *The Painter of Modern Life*, and in Jacob, alongside such explicitly meta-literary prose poems as "The Novel," "Literature and Poetry," and "Literary

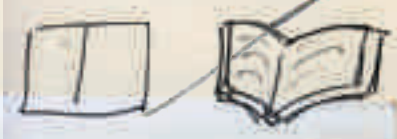
Standards,” in such meta-aesthetic prose poems as “A Bit of Art Criticism” and “To Mr. Modigliani to Prove I’m a Poet” and Jacob’s friendships with such artists as Modigliano, Braque, Cocteau, and especially Picasso, who included him in his artwork “Three Musicians” — Atkins actively combines the writing of prose poems with his work as a video artist. Where “Between States” is a prose-poetic rendition of a film that predates *The Logic of the Stairwell*, the collection’s “Synopsis” section is composed of prose-poetic “transcriptions” of some of his recent experimental films.¹⁴ Thus extending the prose poem’s reach as a genre which I have argued “wants *out* of genre and still finds itself, for all that, inscribed in genre,” Atkins further cultivates what I have called the prose poem’s “fundamentally polemical function within the network of genres it seeks to undermine and transform,”¹⁵ developing it as a continuously disrupted and disruptive, dislocated and dislocating genre, a “genreless genre”¹⁶ that constantly works against its own sedimentation and reification. Mapping everyday life in all its representational forms and media as ultimately unknowable, always provisional, and in this sense especially, as profoundly situated and situational, Atkins’ at once intra-literary, cross-genre, interdiscursive, intermedial coupling of prose poems and video art figures a moment-by-moment sense of dislocation, disorientation, and displacement not as the exception, on the so-called “surface,” as well as on the “deepest levels,” of daily experience, but as the rule.

- 1 *The Dice Cup: Selected Prose Poems* (ed. Michael Brownstein). New York: Sun, 1979, 5.
- 2 Marc Atkins, *The Logic of the Stairwell and Other Images*. Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2011, 76.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 4 Jonathan Monroe, *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, 16.
- 5 Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen* (trans. Louise Varèse), New York, New Directions, 1970, ix.
- 6 Marc Atkins, *The Prism Walls*. London: Contraband Books, 2014, 59.
- 7 Marc Atkins, *The Logic of the Stairwell*, op. cit., 14.
- 8 *Id.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 10 Marc Atkins, *The Prism Walls*, op. cit., 37.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 14 vimeo.com/marcatkins/videos
- 15 Jonathan Monroe, *A Poverty of Objects*, op. cit. 15-16.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 334.





Offering for the sake of a moment
and the ordinary year things be still and



Can you hear the calls from the hills or
the lone evening birds, the empty trees?
The great furniture is piled in the hill
piled up by rusty legs, damaged by
waiting for the hand to pass to give all
sides of the sun showing pictures.



BRIAN BAKER

A Fugitive Archive: Marc Atkins and Iain Sinclair

In *Dark Lantborns* (1999), Iain Sinclair's book of walks which re-trace journeys inscribed in the *London A-Z* of David Rodinsky – “a self-taught linguist entombed in his [Princelet Street] attic by walls of fast-breeding ephemera”¹ —, a subtle visual joke locates Marc Atkins' role in relation to Sinclair's writing. For a circuit of Dagenham, on the Essex/ London fringe, “Atkins would [have] come along to procure some serviceable photographs [but] early on the day of the walk, Atkins pulled out. He'd twisted his back.”² The walk goes on without him, Sinclair wielding a Super-8 camera instead.

However, on the page facing the description of this non-arrival, we are presented with a full-length colour photograph of Atkins himself, taken by Sinclair. Dressed in black jacket, grey t-shirt and open-necked red checked shirt over khaki cargo trousers, Atkins leans against black railings. He holds up the *London A-Z* in his left hand while his right clasps an SLR camera, pressed into his right hip. Atkins looks off to the side, his gaze hidden by black shades. Behind the railings is blue sky, scrubland, a metal silo. It's a shot of Atkins as urban explorer or psychogeographer, but the face is expressionless, the pose at once casual and (with the A-Z as prop turned artfully to the camera lens) somewhat staged, almost parodic. Just as Atkins' presence in the text denotes an absence – he “pulled out” of the walk – the positioning of the photograph at this particular place, and the carefully distanced and self-effacing pose, seem to indicate that for all his material presence in the photo, Atkins *is not really there*. Although his work appears in several Sinclair texts, including

the collaboration *Liquid City* (1999), and he is himself described and narrated at length in both *Lights Out for the Territory* (1998) and *London Orbital* (2002), this is the only photograph of Atkins to appear in the books. His work with Sinclair thus seems, inscribed into the play of presence and absence that is a recurrent motif in Sinclair's work, from occluded histories to spectres and golems, to memories and archives. As I will explore in what follows, what we often find in the relation between Atkins' work and Sinclair's texts is less a *collaboration* and more of a deep *implication*, Atkins' own visual sensibility drawn deep into the very foundations of the texts.

'This lurker with a Leica'

Atkins' photographs are crucial to the fabric of several non-fiction book projects with Sinclair, beginning with *Lights Out for the Territory* in 1998 and largely coming to a formal close with *London Orbital* in 2002. He also appears as a “character” in several Sinclair fictions under light disguise, as “Axel Turner” in the Sinclair/ Dave McKean collaboration *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (1997) and as “Imar O'Hagan” in *Radon Daughters* (1994). When Atkins and the film-maker Chris Petit are given a small space at the end of *Radon Daughters* in which their own voices are presented (rather than fictionalised/ ventriloquized by Sinclair in the main body of the fiction), Sinclair reveals his recurrent practice of blurring the fictional and the “real”, and in particular that his colleagues and companions tended to have walk-on parts in his fictions. It also emphasises Sinclair's foundational assumption that “real life” is always narrated, fictionalised, pre-told.

When Atkins is introduced in *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair's first major “cross-over” work based upon a walking survey of counter-cultural artists, poets and activists in end-of-the-millennium London, the text emphasises the malleability of biography: “Atkins, growing up in a mining community (according to one

version of his infinitely adjustable history) was subjected to Catholic pieties”.³ Concrete details are cancelled, scrubbed out, in a typical Sinclair gesture, because an “infinitely adjustable history” is the very matter of Sinclair's investigations of London. Atkins is inserted into the tropes of Sinclair's work here, becoming a “character” in the non-fiction, as “Atkins”, as well as a fictional character as “Axel Turner” or “Imar O'Hagan” in the fiction. Of course, Sinclair's texts partake of the thing they critique; as well as exposing the “adjustable history” of London in *Sorry Meniscus* (1999) – about the Millennium Dome, for which Atkins provided the cover shot and internal photographs – Sinclair's work articulates an alternative mythography of London (particularly in early texts *Lud Heat* [1975] and *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* [1987]).

Atkins, “this lurker with a Leica [...] a vegan (living on choc bars, crisps, Guinness)”⁴ becomes one of Sinclair's ambulant companions by the time of *London Orbital*.

As with Chris Petit and later Andre Kötting, Sinclair relies upon an ally whose mode of artistic expression is largely visual as a kind of counterpoint to the expressive literariness of Sinclair's own responses:

The work Marc Atkins does is complementary. He observes the observers; he keeps his own record of journeys that are not of his choosing. . . . Very often, I find these photographs more useful than my jottings or snapshots. In the best of Marc's prints, spurned locations come to life.⁵

If *Liquid City* (1999) is a collaboration (or rather, in a typical gesture we will find repeated elsewhere, authorship is disavowed by Sinclair when he writes that Atkins “published a book of London photographs” with no mention of collaborative work in *London Orbital*), then at other points Atkins' sensibility is inscribed into

the very practices of walking and writing that inform Sinclair's books.

Portraits (I)

In *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair concentrates on an Atkins shot of Eric Mottram, Professor at King's College, London, and a considerable figure in the post-war British poetry scene. Sinclair and Atkins visit Mottram at Herne Hill to take a portrait for a book tribute to which Sinclair had contributed. This scene appears both in *Lights Out* and, at greater length as "Is This London?", in *Liquid City*.

There, at the end of Sinclair's piece, we find a shot of Mottram in an armchair, composed just off-centre with the space of the open-plan kitchen behind him. Elbows planted on the arms of the chair, index fingers point outwards to 10 and 2 o'clock, Mottram's left hand entering the light, open space of the kitchen, while the right hand points towards the camera itself. Mottram's gaze, perhaps talking to Sinclair (out of frame), bisects the angle. The pose is at once domestic and grand, static and intensely gestural. You can almost hear Mottram talking, "denounc[ing] the egotism of recently hyped versifiers [...] furry eyebrows leap[ing] to attention."⁷

As with Atkins' portrait of the writer Robin Cook (Derek Raymond), presented elsewhere in *Liquid City* and paired with Sinclair's poem "where the talent is", the shot of Mottram is deeply implicated in mortality. Cook, terminally ill during the readings of the Petit/Sinclair film *The Cardinal and the Corpse* (1993), gaunt face grinning directly at the camera under a dark wedge of beret, died soon afterwards; Mottram, in "fine boisterous form" at the launch of the book in his honour, only lives for a few more weeks. Here, then, the portrait becomes the "obit shot". At the end of the graphic story "The Double Death of the Falconer"⁸ in *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*,

in which Atkins (as Axel Turner) has an exhibition, two distant pencil figures are shown meeting in conversation in Battersea Park. One (Sinclair) tells the other: "The story's dead in the water. They say it's all been done. Sorry, son, but it's back to the walks and the obit snapshots."⁸ As death pervades the story, the subject as well as photography itself, the story has nowhere else to go, and ends on a kind of in-joke, but one that reveals the camera's implication in both time and mortality.

Necropolis

"Too many of the writers we visited would find an Atkins portrait decorating their obituary notices," Sinclair writes in the last section of *Liquid City*.⁹ If "every image is an elegy"¹⁰ for something or someone lost, the implication of photography in mortality, in the impossible project of attempting to preserve or retrieve (another key Sinclair word) a moment from past or present time, is a recurrent touchstone in the Atkins/Sinclair collaborations. In *London Orbital*, Sinclair describes Atkins' "intention to freeze time"¹¹, to produce an archive for future consultation. He writes:

Atkins was working in black and white, future memories anticipated, instinctive retrievals; the darkness he tried to draw out, heavy skies reconfigured in an improvised darkroom, secret weathers.¹²

In *Radon Daughters*, Atkins appears as Imar O'Hagan, but as noted above, is present at the end as himself. Three photographs of a tomb at Mary Matfellow in Whitechapel are arranged on the page as a pyramid, and underneath we find Atkins' own voice in a prose-poem three sentences long. The third sentence runs: "The crescent's rise above this stone heart suggested a height for the new mound, a congealed mound of activated space and ghost-imagery."¹³ This attempt to "capture, on the shortest day of the year, the spirit of the missing

Whitechapel mound"¹⁴ is at once an invocation and an acknowledgement of absence, but the idea of "activated space" provides a means by which to approach Atkins' photographs of London.

From the view of Thames mud and jetties, the Dome fading into grey haze on the cover of *Sorry Meniscus*, to the lowering skies over Greenwich in *Liquid City*,¹⁵ London is presented as space, and if not geometrically or abstractly then as a material entity that exists separately from its human inhabitants. A sequence of architectural shots from page 92 onwards of *Liquid City* offer a largely depopulated city, streets emptied or human figures tiny presences among the dominating brick, tarmac, reinforced concrete and plate glass. In this set of photographs, there is an unusual sense of (physical) distance in the compositions, panoramic views of London's skyline in black and white, the river and its bridges very much to the fore. Bankside, Tower Bridge, Westminster Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament are oriented on a dominantly riverine axis. In one two-page panel, London squats low under banked cloud, Canary Wharf in the far left distance, HMS Belfast edging into darkness in the bottom right; in another, a grainy winter London, Big Ben and Westminster Cathedral in centre frame, fades into twilight, a greyscale Turner or Monet. On other pages crisp shots of the concrete spans of Waterloo Bridge under summer skies (repeated on the cover of *Liquid City*) abut noir-ish gloom. There is no single city here, no 'London', but a collection of different times and moods and spaces that resist totality. If the city is not quite an empty graveyard or necropolis, nor yet is it quite a *lived* space. It seems to exist in a transaction between geometry and materiality, between architecture and the messiness of city life. Although Atkins and Sinclair traverse the city as companions, the London they present is "a crowd of absences and negations, contrails, entrails, mud, paint: to evoke isolation."¹⁶

Portraits (II)

Few of Atkins' photographs in *Lights Out*, *Sorry Meniscus* or *Liquid City* are direct, posed, full-face portraits. Often the approach is oblique or seemingly fugitive, Rachel Lichtenstein framed between the back of Sinclair and Petit's heads, both dressed in dark overcoats with collars turned up like heavies from a Jules Dassin noir; John Healy and Sinclair walking side-by-side along a wooden fence, Healy's right thumb pressed to his chin in a mobile version of the *Thinker*; Howard Marks skinning up, half in shadow, in front of the MI6 building in *Lights Out*; or the portrait of Mottram, arms akimbo. Instead, Atkins captures thought, preoccupation or concentration, and his shots of Sinclair in *Liquid City* often seize the author off-guard: tipping a glass of beer, looking down at a booklet or map (half surprised), preparing to drop down from a high wall.

The immediacy of the moment is central, but these are not simply visual "backstage" jokes to set against or alongside the literary projects of the walks, or an unofficial record of "thereness". In a sense, the centrality of *thought*, the capturing of interiority, is crucial, and is of a piece with Sinclair's own projects, his walks and books and films. Movement through physical space is also movement through mental or emotional space, and it is not just "drift", but *walking with a purpose*. Atkins's photographs present and extend the intentionality that is key to Sinclair's (quasi-magical/alchemical) engagement with space and place.

On the cover of *Radon Daughters*, one of Atkins' studio photographs of draped female nudes is used, a spectral image that corresponds to the X-ray plate addictions suffered by one of the novel's characters. *Liquid City* reproduces other plates chosen by Sinclair from Atkins' collection, including a print titled "Rodinsky's Mirror" wherein a female model, ghostly white against a scratchy

darkness, holds in front of her a mirror that Sinclair writes had once resided in Rodinsky's Princelet Street attic. Sinclair writes of the mirror:

with the aid of a few scratches and a swirling soup of brown-gold light, the print sidesteps time and place and perfectly delineates a novel that will, now, never have to be written. The portrait, achieved by this sorcery, appears on the back of the mirror. It is another entity, unknown to the subject and photographer.¹⁷

This is a common trope in Sinclair's writing: alchemical practices, the numinous, the conjuring of a "third" presence unknown to artist or subject. Here, the materiality of the nudes – what Sinclair describes as "the female nude, light-sculpted, draped, posed against a shaded window. Flesh seen as soft stone"¹⁸ – becomes spectral, there/ not there.

This register is also apparent in *Dark Lanthorns*, where stills from Atkins' videos is reproduced in the text, unusually, in grainy colour. Sinclair writes that Atkins' "scheme for the film is to scan faces, interrogate the ghosts of the borough, searching for some residue of the vanished scholar".¹⁹ Here, then, the faces of people are presumed to reveal the 'ghosts' of place, of the lost Rodinsky. This is less portraiture than an articulation of Poe's 'Man of the Crowd', Rodinsky a kind of *genius populi* that is brought forth through an act of alchemical visualization. The face and facelessness – the image of Rodinsky himself, significantly, appears nowhere in these works – become one.

An image from *Lights Out for the Territory* illuminates what Sinclair called, in relation to the film of *London Orbital*, "the split nature of our project". The word "split" is a significant one in Sinclair's lexicon, used in *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings* to denote a fractured

Gothicised subject, and elsewhere in relation to the collaborative projects he undertakes, which (like the screen of the *London Orbital* film) remains "split" rather than becoming a whole entity. As we saw above, Sinclair seemed to categorise *Liquid City* as Atkins' book of London photographs; describing Rodinsky's Room, he describes his contributions as "speculative essays for Rachel Lichtenstein's book",²⁰ a characteristic disavowal of authorial intention over a collaborative work. This image is from one of Atkins' plates in *Lights Out for the Territory*. It shows a desecrated cemetery statue at Chingford Mount, an angelic figure with head and right arm lopped off. The head is vertically split and rests on a large obelisk standing behind the statue. A very similar image, from a slightly different angle, is reproduced in *Liquid City*, attesting to its importance. Rather than a Janus-like facing in opposite directions, the split head rather emblematises an incomplete coming together of two halves, two practices (writing and photography), or even two thoughts.

As I wrote in my 2007 book on Sinclair, "in *Liquid City* the text and the image represent the same space, the same experience, but differently. The text does not attempt to comment on, or determine the meaning of the photograph, nor does the image 'illustrate' the text".²¹ Rather, and this can be taken as a metonym for the Atkins/ Sinclair collaborations as a whole, "text and image stand in dialectical relation,"²² the relationship between the two allowing for a space of dynamic interaction and (readerly) interpretation. The split head signifies not brokenness, but *incompletion*; it remains our work to try to put them together.

1 Iain Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*. Uppingham: Goldmark, 1999, 10.

2 *Ibid.*, 28.

3 Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London*. London, Granta, 1998, 267.

4 Ibid., 263 , 264.

5 Ibid., 31.

6 Ibid., 31.

7 Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, op.cit., 42.

8 Iain Sinclair and Dave McKean, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*. London, Phoenix, 1998, 131.

9 Marc Atkins and Iain Sinclair, *Liquid City*. London, Reaktion, 1999, 224.

10 Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, op. cit., 280.

11 Iain Sinclair, *London Orbital*. London: Granta, 2002, 31.

12 Ibid., 25.

13 Iain Sinclair, *Radon Daughters*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, 456.

14 Marc Atkins and Iain Sinclair, *Liquid City*, op. cit., 222.

15 Ibid., 52-53.

16 Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, op. cit., 267.

17 Marc Atkins and Iain Sinclair, *Liquid City*, op. cit., 188.

18 Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory*, op. cit., 264.

19 Iain Sinclair, *Dark Lanthorns*, op. cit., 20.

20 Marc Atkins and Iain Sinclair, *Liquid City*, op. cit., 223.

21 Baker, Brian, *Iain Sinclair*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007, 127.

22 Ibid., 130.







ROD MENGHAM

Fleeing the Light

At the conceptual centre of Marc Atkins's new series of photographs, "Equivalents", is an image of the Roman Forum: physical remnants whose ruined state underlines the permanence, or at least the endurance, of the idea they represent, which is that of permanence itself. Yet in Atkins's hands, the image starts to dissolve, colours begin to leach away, and the monuments become perishable. The stone achieves zero gravity, weighs less than photographic paper, is outlasted not only by the snapshot in which it is contained, but also by the discarded portrait whose bright colours dominate the foreground.

The tourist shot includes an extraneous element, which is the Trojan Horse of art in an era of mechanical reproduction. Rome itself was founded on the success of the original Trojan Horse. In Atkins's work, the strategic distraction is that of point of view. We might expect to look at the Forum, but instead we look at a portrait we cannot properly see. The correct angle of approach to the object of contemplation is inaccessible, located somewhere in the space that lies behind the surface of the photograph. Every photograph in the new series involves this dynamic, whereby the frame does not mark out what we look at but opens onto a scene in which looking is already taking place. The object of contemplation is less the photograph in the show than the photograph it depicts, the object that has been placed or abandoned in an unavailable narrative. These discards are often slight in appearance, yet the aesthetic strategy of the work gives them an extraordinary power over the environments in which they appear. They flout the architectural logic of receding vistas; the discipline embodied in the perspectival view of a bridge is deflected, offset by a casual and stylish display of female physical power, in an impromptu celebration of indifference to male control.

The allocation of relative degrees of power to gendered points of view is systematically troubled in this work. One shot features a male figure, head apparently swathed in bandages, but actually caught in a rapid movement blur; the effect proposes a scenario of medical interference which places at the dead centre of attention a tattoo resembling a raised welt; this carefully inflicted injury rhymes disturbingly with lips brightly outlined in the discarded female portrait lying under the bed. The allusion to a vampiric archetype allows some play with the idea of the photograph as afraid of the light, and as a reflecting surface in which the face of the observer cannot be seen, as well as conjuring up the vulnerability of the subject detached from an original setting. Just as the vampire needs to leave deposits of Transylvanian earth in various safe houses, so Atkins deposits the traces of his work in a variety of locales: Italy, Poland, France, U.S.A., London, to name only those which are immediately obvious.

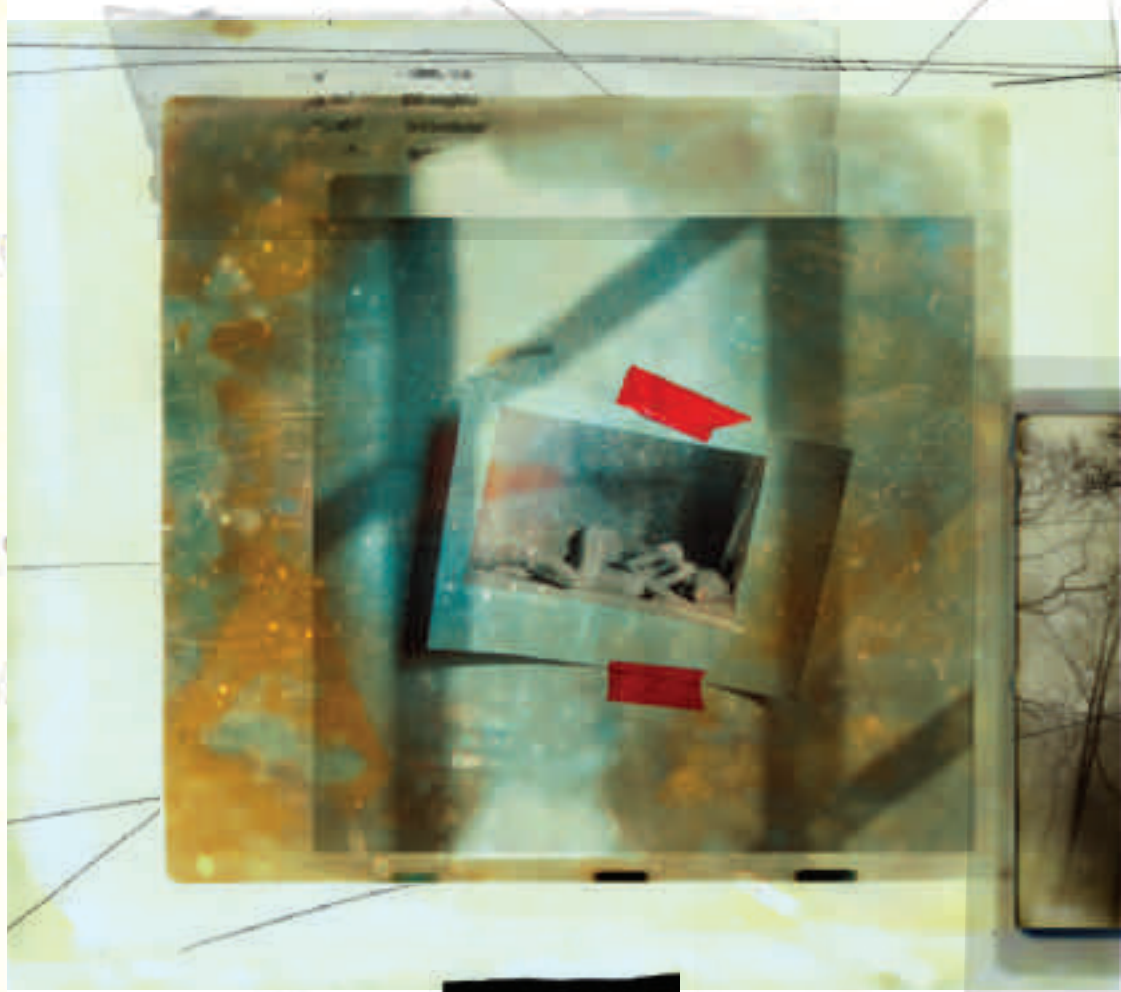
Many of the discards appear to have been put down momentarily before being caught up again, gaining their place in the landscape for no longer than it takes to make a telephone call, suggesting that photographs and settings are potentially interchangeable, subject to a process of endless translation. A significant number of the environments that Atkins is drawn to record the after-effects of this process: tables, floors and walls have the appearance of a palimpsest of innumerable impositions; they have been tattooed, literally, by a history of domestic rhythms, largely of ingestion and regulation. The Atkins landscape is anchored in scenarios of neglect, of clutter, dilapidation, and stratified impressibility: an ancient drain; the Thames foreshore; the locked doors of a burial vault. The photograph by the drain is about to be disposed of in a setting which disposes of everything; the foreshore is a place which remembers everything that has ever happened to it, but which is both ignored and despised; the burial vault is a place that has been set aside for

commemoration but which has every appearance of being forgotten.

The ratios of remembering and forgetting, of permanence and impermanence, of control and vulnerability, are rendered most exactly in a pair of images that feature the same woman: once as the subject of a discard, once as an apparent intermediary, poised in the moment of translation from subject into object and back again. The first of these images is introduced into a London tube carriage, a place of intense and constant scrutiny of faces and representations, yet it is placed in a position that is invisible to the ordinary passenger, and can only be seen by contrivance, by using the point of view of committed voyeurism, a point of view that is both cherished and disowned. In the other image, the same woman is seen holding up for inspection the photograph of a female nude, yet her own gaze is averted, away from both the photograph itself and from the viewer, who can only inspect the representation of female nudity by ignoring the "real" woman.

One's glance travels backwards and forwards, uncertain of the true focus of the work, of the social and artistic decorum it bears witness to, of the attitudes and self-consciousness of the two women implicated in the scene, of the nature of the privacy it may or may not violate, of the degree of exploitation, or refusal to exploit, it requires from the viewer. This constant passing from one point to another occurs within the individual composition, but also between compositions, and across the whole series. Atkins's work is composed of passages that each successive instance of construction translates into equivalent, but different, terms; it always brings with it the trace of its origins, the ground from which it has emerged and to which it will return, and it is locked into a cycle of addiction, succumbing constantly to a light from which it must always retreat.

galeriaaff.infocentrum.com/2001/atkins/atkins_a.html





MARC ATKINS

Afterword - Lands Which Escape the Mind

There are things an artist should not know about their work, as certain thoughts can temper the desire, sway decisions, disrupt the stream of creativity. Yet, reading observations on their work can be a conformation, or not, as to whether their ideas have performed a successful mutation from object as an act of thought to a *reasonable* understanding by another. In different ways, such reflections contained in this book are uncomfortable reading for me. I can hardly reconcile these accounts to those of the fearful, confused, wistful, anxiety-ridden, flickering images drawn from visions of dark searing beauty and painful mortality which I see. And although I recognise the essays have encapsulated with vibrant clarity and succulent precision the extra-dimensional extremes of my world, and each in its own way has said what I would like it to say, I must attempt to add a little more to this survey of some of the work I have produced over the last thirty or so years.

People ask why I seem to have no single obsession, no sole, distinct subject matter in my work, but I believe I do. To me there is little difference between things, all is lit by light, time and imagination, and each is five-dimensional, in length, breadth, height, duration and activation. I consequently think of the world as my palette, I am happy to draw from all its *colours*. There are of course unique factors to each elemental, the urban being a cast of shadows, the pastoral a cast of light, for example, but light and dust drifts across naked skin as it does over an evening street or a field at dawn.

My images are irrational asides, untenable constructs, incorporeal forms, stochastic endeavours, unreasonable assertions, disruptions (to the tyranny) of logic, have frayed edges, intangible weight, stifling distance, motionless drift. I do not know why or how they come about, but humans make marks, and these are mine. I write when I draw, I photograph when I construct sounds, I film when I write . . . I image whatever comes to mind with whatever comes to hand, blurring media where necessary, as all methods are valid. There are of course distinctions, someone once asked me what the difference between a painting and a photograph was, I answered that a photograph is always *of* something. Textual images have different boundaries to that of “plastic” images; the image of a descriptive phrase is seen immediately, possibly before it is described, but a photographed scene remains unseen (the lens darkens at the moment the image is “taken”), until the photographer sees the image (here we drift into the realms of quantum theory, superpositions, collapsing wavefunctions). But these are each merely distinctions of application, process and handling.

I think of photography as a phenomenon of acceleration. Although the capturing of a moment gives the impression of being an act of slowing existence to a mote of time, to me it is in fact the rushing, or collapsing of a past, present and future into this image of a moment. I therefore look to embed many time fields into the structure of the image, along with its processing, and the ever mutable emotional states, social overlays, et al. The image is then released into the world, and further layers are added. It is of its time now, and you the viewer, give your time now to the image, this image which originated in a different time, but is yet now and which continues into time future. Like Cézanne’s apples (rotting in a bowl over the several weeks it took for him to paint them), and early photographic portraits (people sitting for several long

minutes while the plate was exposed — expressions, attitudes, attentions, thoughts shifting, are each being recorded, including the transitions, onto the photographic plate), I look to incorporate all possible states into my images, of whatever form. “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future / And time future contained in time past.”, and all that.

We continually move from one world to another, from the urban to the pastoral, from interior to exterior, from shade to light, from thought to deed. I attempt to capture that which occupies the infinite place between states, that which abides inside a zone that lies at the juncture of conditions, that which exists between circumstance, within the plane of congruence, and it is the crossover point where the image is gained, that dark glass were the observer and the observed meet, and on which the image is held.

The image is a place, and in this place I aim to suggest to you more than you immediately see. I like to consider that regarding my images, visual or textual, is to undertake a journey, where you will travel in a state of incomplete awakening, through the relentless and invisible. Through these images you can take many journeys, as an image can never be wholly grasped, the forms, the shifts and the shadows can be moved amongst, and there, where time dislocates, distance expands, places and events become displaced and memory is no longer aligned, drift and purposefulness begin to intertwine, very soon chronology becomes unhelpful and notions of objectivity are born from the next imagined story. When attempting to reinstate the actuality of the discovered places, mis-memories are confirmed by the ever mutating reality that is the image. The more the image is search for, the further it expands, and each step within it fixes the direction towards the next encounter. As you cross into new zones so the way taken through them is lost. In the

dark corners you are witness transformation, where even a small breath of light will dispel the forms that hide there. Walking within the borderland, not on, but immersed into the threshold between states, this is the singular place, the precise moment where worlds meet, is the locus of congruence and transfiguration. Here, as time and space expands, all things metamorphose, mutate by the second. The myriad windows look out across cities, landscapes, forms which are each at once elegant and desolate. These images are of landscapes of the mind, fields of the invisible, cities of the unattainable, forms of the incorporeal. These are images located below the surface of immediate visibility.



NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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South and East. He also edited the seminal 1996 poetry anthology, *Conductors of Chaos*. His novels include *Downriver*, *Slow Chocolate Autopsy: Incidents from the Notorious Career of Norton, Prisoner of London*; illustrated by David McKean), *Landor's Tower*, *White Goods* and *Dining on Stones*. His non-fiction works include *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London*, *Liquid City* (with Marc Atkins), *London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25*, and *Edge of the Orison*, and *Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report*, which was shortlisted for the 2010 Ondaatje Prize. Iain Sinclair lives in Hackney, East London.
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The first photograph of a human being that I know of is a plate exposed in Paris by Louis Daguerre in 1839, from a window looking down on the Boulevard du Temple. Just below the centre, one can make out a small anonymous figure, standing having his boots shined, while all the world moves about him in an uncapturable blur, he is still for long enough for his image to be fixed on a copper plate, which would have taken several minutes to expose. We are all different people since that day.

I must thank each esteemed person who gave of their precious time, distinctive intellect and sharp insight to put to paper their thoughts on specific elements of my work. Also, I am immeasurably grateful to Michel Delville for his astute editorship, laudable adeptness and impressive wit in compiling this volume. I deeply appreciate the expertise and diligence of Edith Micha, Michel Delville, Julie Bawin and Jean-Patrick Duchesne in putting together the exhibition at the Collections artistiques de l'Université de Liège, Galerie Wittert, to which this publication relates. And I am not least deeply obliged to Russell Warren-Fisher, for his time and inimitable virtuosity designing the posters, invitations and the "Marc Atkins" painted logo adorning the cover of this book.

M.A.