

ED ATKINS

Conspicuously, my videos have stopped talking. A few years ago they were drenched in speech. Long, elliptical monologues soliloquized by lone male protagonists, the works tended towards speechifying—even if lyrical, even if more or less coherent. Still, language flooded the videos in a manner that, looking back, bolsters my doubts about the rest. Language legitimizes, I suppose, while maintaining ambivalence. Legitimacy occurs either through elucidation or, in my case, by overtly steering an audience's bewilderment towards something recognizable as such. Language corrupted is palpable, it makes wrongness identifiable, because language directly correlates to meaning. I don't know. For plenty of reasons, I've stopped believing in my ability to wield language ambivalently or with any freedom through deniability of sense or didactic meaning-making. Lyricism, too, feels more than a little rote right now. And not that I've devoted my work towards literalism or direct political commitment, though that's happened a little; it's more that language specifically has drifted away from the videos and has settled entirely in writing. So it's not that I've stopped writing or speaking, but that the videos and their particular fantasy can't do it, can't get away with it. As if their totalizing form—their holism—can too easily tame language into ambient sensation. OR that I just don't think a solitary white male figure, one who is most certainly a cipher or a caricature—a symbol—should be given a voice. CGI men can't risk being mistaken for real men; CGI whiteness can't risk being mistaken for the real thing anymore. Maybe it's that satire is dead, and a whole world of nuanced or honed figuration has been totally destroyed. People say that, don't they? That satire is no longer possible. Anyway, the men don't speak anymore, and I think that's a good thing. Men, as a category—which is what is being represented in the videos, as opposed to individual people who rightly give the slip to the categorical—should shut the fuck up. That chorus, which is horribly easy to invoke or stumble upon or accidentally chime with, is a mistake to be avoided entirely. So I can write and be me—Ed Atkins or whoever I am—but these surrogates should most likely be mute, or simply listen. I stand by my earlier work, totally—just that making a decision regarding a depiction of a caricatured man should now be different. Maybe they should suffer, like they do in my recent videos. Maybe they should cry, apologize? This risks looking mistakenly like a kind of pitiableness—that

the videos seek pity. I don't think so. There's nothing to be pitied. At least not in the category. Certainly in the figuring of some universal corporeal ontologies, etc. Anyways. That's something. ===