

LAZY

# The Night Before An Interview with Mark Leckey

In many ways, Mark Leckey operates like a skater. Across a diverse array of practices (video essays, installations, performances, music, research, and curatorial endeavors), he shuns a detached, intellectual

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down for a while, it got crazy. HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED ABOUT SKATING? Yeah I used to have a

ton of dreams about the indoor skatepark I grew up at reopening and me getting to skate it again. It always feels amazing. WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL SLEEPING SITUATION? Nice medium firmness

mattress with two pillows behind my head, one arm under the head pillow, a pillow in between my legs to keep my hips level since I've had surgery on my hips. WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU CAN'T SLEEP? Watch TV and stress about it getting dumb late.

Marie de Courcy

WHAT'S YOUR SLEEP ROUTINE? My sleep routine varies. I try to get to bed somewhere between 11 and 12 but typically not till after 12-sometimes as late as 3 a.m. I'm a bit of an insomniac and somewhere between 2 to 3

nights a week are spent at my boyfriend's or my other partners' places. I try to brush my teeth and wash my face every night before bed but usually only get that 3 or 4 times a week. I sleep with ambient music playing every night-I have ADHD and need something else to focus

Mark Leckey: Dream English Kid, 1954-1999 AD, 2015 (st111)



stance popular among institutional art circles, opting instead for complete immersion in his subjects. Like the orators of old, he allows ideas, emotions, and subcultures to flow through him. At times, this approach may tiptoe towards sentimentality, as Leckey himself admits, but it also reveals a mischievous irreverence. More than anything, Leckey knows where he comes from, and it's those Northern English, working-class roots that help him strike a delicate balance between self-awareness and enchantment.

In our conversation, Leckey displayed a welcoming candor, possibly the byproduct of a visit to the chiropractor's earlier that day. Yet, as we delved deeper, his characteristic tangents and philosophizing emerged. It was enlightening to learn about the process behind some of Leckey's most iconic works, such as his tribute to underground dance culture in the UK, *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999)—"I used to get quite drunk and edit it." And we uncovered unexpected parallels between his methodologies and those of skaters: the inspiration they both draw from fashion and the profound nostalgia they chase through video.

Plank (PL): Hey Mark, how are you doing?

Mark Leckey (ML): I'm alright. Just back from seeing a chiropractor. Look after yourself. That's my wisdom after all these years.

PL: So, I wanted to talk about nighttime with you. A lot of your work looks at nightlife, like *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999), or happens at night, like your recent video, *Dazzle Dark* (2023). So, I'm curious. What draws you to the dark?

ML: I think night's more cinematic, even though I don't make cinema—I make videos. Even on a fairly cheap camera, it can look effective, you know what I mean? The dark just lends itself to the moving visual image.

And then, darkness was always where memories seemed to reside. It's funny, because when I made *Fiorucci*, we had just come out of this period where, to capture memory, the cliché was Super 8. So you take a Super 8 camera down to the seaside in the day and that would be your hazy halcyon days of memory, right?

PL: That's also a trope of skate videos.

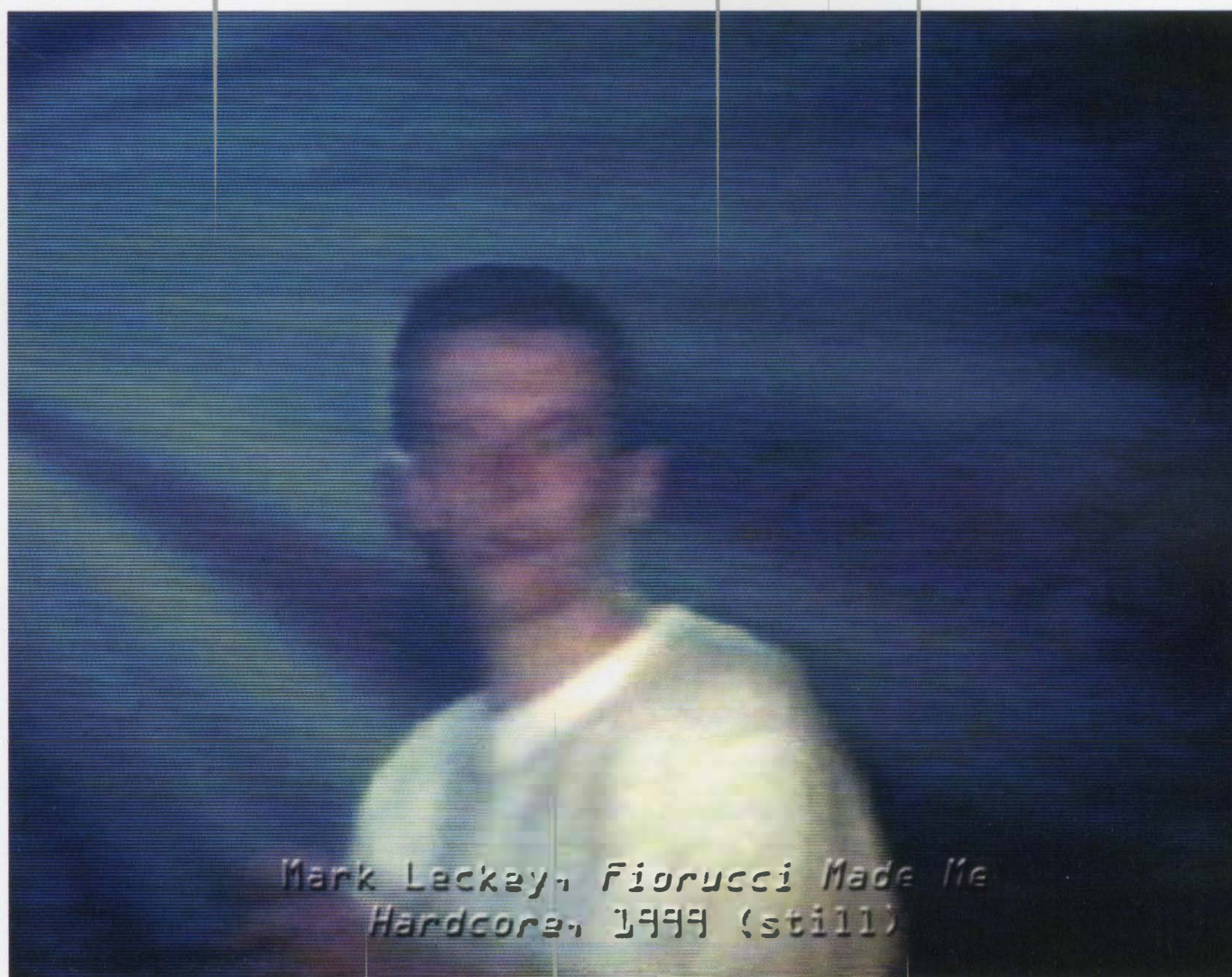
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on other than my thoughts. ARE YOU AN ENTHUSIASTIC OR BEGRUDGING SLEEPER? Enthusiastic typically! I love to sleep when I actually can but when I'm having bad fits of insomnia (which typically last a week or two), I get scared of my dreams

I think my body keeps me awake as a defense mechanism. DO YOU USE ANYTHING TO HELP YOU SLEEP? Sometimes I will smoke weed, maybe 2 to 3 days a week. Melatonin makes me too groggy in the morning, like a hangover. DO YOU TAKE NAPS THROUGHOUT THE



ML: It is, isn't it? So, I didn't want that. **It was slightly contaminated.** The idea of trying to convey memory—that's what I was trying to do with *Fiorucci*. So again, VHS looks, well, not better, but it has a particular quality when it's shot in poor light or extreme contrast. It gets quite blurry and blobby and kind of psychedelic. I like that. So, it's more to do with what I can do with the image than my own set of memories.



PL: At the end of *Fiorucci*, the lights come on and people are emerging from the club. It's very ethereal.

ML: Every video camera picks up the gloaming very nicely, you know? The color, the contrast, all of it. With *Fiorucci*, though, it was all found footage, and most of it was nighttime footage.

PL: That brings up an interesting issue: balancing memory and history, primary documents versus subjective perspectives. And I'm wondering, how do you balance those

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as I'd like to, but when I can, and when I feel need to, I do. WHAT DO YOU TYPICALLY DREAM ABOUT? My dreams can be surreal, scary even. Typically they'll be fairly unsettling or strange warped versions of my waking reality. I think I have prophetic dreams or premonitions

often, and have seen things from my dreams happen in real life whether as signs or warnings or just a glimpse into the future or whatever you want to think about that kind of thing. Rarely do I have peaceful or silly dreams but they're always appreciated. HAVE YOU EVER



things in the work?

ML: Not intentionally. I sort of discovered it while making *Fiorucci*. I didn't set out to make a documentary. I set out to make a video essay.

The initial intention was to make an argument about a particular strand of culture being overlooked or disregarded—or seen as kind of idiotic. You know, all the attention at that time was on Britpop, bands like Oasis. And I hated all that



Mark Leckey: *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*, 1999 (still)

stuff. I just thought it was retrogressive and backward-looking. And at the same time, this other dance music was being made that was propelling itself into the future. And I made that video out of—it wasn't anger, but I was disgruntled. **It was a disgruntled video essay**, where I wanted to make an argument for this dance culture I grew up with.

And so that was the intention, but then as I was making it, I just couldn't find a device that worked for it. I mean, the original version of *Fiorucci* has me doing a voiceover.

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DREAMED ABOUT SKATING? I've dreamt about skating a few times, not many though. I remember one dream, just at the park with some friends and I was ripping, it was awesome. I didn't miss a single trick and was doing things that were maybe a little too hard for me to do

in real life easily. I have had dreams touring skate spots that I still have yet to skate just imagining the landscape best from whatever subconscious picture my brain has developed from seeing them on videos. WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU CAN'T SLEEP? When I can't sleep I'll scroll

Mark Leckey: *Fiorucci Made*



couldn't bear to listen to it.

PL: *Fiorucci*, to me, feels a lot like a skate video. It has such a distinct perspective and it's told through fashion, editing, montage, and music. And it's told through movement, which is really interesting.

ML: I guess the similarity is that I wasn't trying to make an art video. Like I said, I was trying to make a document, but in the process of doing that, it became more about me, about



my subjective response to this passage, about a very intense nostalgia and **a very intense desire to be in the image.** I just became so fixated on watching this stuff, and found it very difficult to pull myself away, back into reality or back into the mundane.

So, when I was making *Fiorucci* I just wanted to be with these images in this impossible way. The lo-fi quality of the VHS made it even more tantalizing, more seductive. I guess what the VHS did is it abstracted the people. They weren't

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my phone or YouTube, something really boring and calm. I know the blue light is bad but I usually can't sleep because my thoughts are too loud. Or I'll smoke weed and play my guitar, usually distorted through headphones. My thought process behind it is that if I overwhelm

my senses, I'll get tired because of too much data going in. Or I'll just sit there and ruminate until I can finally get my eyes to start closing involuntarily.

Georgia Martin

*Me Hardcore, 1999 (still)*



particular personalities or individuals. They just became a crowd. I could enjoy them like that.

In terms of skating videos, I think you initially set out to document something and then you realize that that quickly becomes quite uninteresting. And so what you're trying to do is convey the feeling of what it is to be skating. You're trying to evoke the feeling of speed and motion. And you use all these techniques to do that. But it's also about proximity,



Mark Leckey- Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore- 1999 (still)

right? You're trying to get closer and closer to the protagonist, the skater; or to the board itself, to the ground.

PL: The fisheye lens.

ML: The fisheye lens. Yeah, exactly. For me it's about proximity. And this is the interesting thing for me about editing. When you set out to make a documentary, there's a certain distance. And in a true documentary, you have to be disinterested. And I wasn't doing that.

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WHAT'S YOUR SLEEP ROUTINE?

Usually I fall asleep around 10 or 11 and wake up from 7 to 8.

ARE YOU AN ENTHUSIASTIC OR

BEGRUDGING SLEEPER? I love sleep

so much, hahaha. DO YOU USE

ANYTHING TO HELP YOU SLEEP? No,

I usually have no issue falling asleep. DO YOU TAKE NAPS

THROUGHOUT THE DAY? Not so much

anymore but if I'm really tired

I can definitely nap. Usually 30

minutes is good for me. WHAT DO

YOU TYPICALLY DREAM ABOUT?

Always something so random.

Recently, I've been going

through a breakup so I've been

dreaming a lot about that. HAVE

Mark Leckey- We Are (U



I was trying to make something where I could be as intimate with the thing as I possibly can, you know what I mean? I could feel it, I could feel the intensity of it.

PL: It seems like you even came from a place of homesickness.

ML: It's yearning, I mean, when I watch it, I just think it's really maudlin, it's real sad boy shit. You know what I mean?

I used to get quite drunk and edit it, I kept in this one bit where I'm really, really pissed, and I'm mumbling about how sad it was making me feel. That's in the video. It's quite buried in the mix. But I can hear what I'm saying. I don't know if anyone else can. I'm just getting overwhelmed with how nostalgic, how melancholic it's all making me feel.

PL: How do you approach the fashion for each of your videos?

ML: I came of consciousness through fashion. It's how I learned to read. It's how I learned to understand and become fascinated by codes and signs, which developed into a desire for the esoteric. Fashion put me on that path of trying to understand why things did what they did to me.

PL: What were your early experiences of fashion like? Were there any labels or garments that gave you that feeling?

ML: I know a lot of people have a similar instance, where they just see someone. You're at the right age, and you'll see someone dressed in a particular way. My first thing was to be both enamored by them, but also slightly, well, not quite disturbed... They just seemed so beyond my experience of life at that time. In some ways, that was intimidating. You're both seduced and intimidated by it.

The first one I saw was when I was 14 or 15. In Liverpool, the style at that time was being a Scally. It later turned into Casual culture. But in the early days, it wasn't about that. It came out of David Bowie around the period of *Low* (1977).

So this guy, he has this big wedge hair style with a duffel coat on. And in Liverpool, I remember seeing one kid in particular, he had dungarees on and a big ginger wedge, this ultra-femme hairstyle with the fringe over one eye. He was very ugly, but he had this beautiful hair. I was completely beguiled by him. I just thought, "What are you?"

That's what they took from Bowie, adopting something

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YOU EVER DREAMED ABOUT SKATING?

Yes! Always skating the coolest spots, usually that I somehow create in my head. I have a recurring dream where I suck compared to everyone else around me lol. WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL

SLEEPING SITUATION? I would say right between firm and soft.

Usually two pillows and these little blankets I've slept with since I was a kid under my neck. I love sleeping in the cold. Typically I fall asleep with no noise or light but if I'm having trouble I will fall asleep watching YouTube. WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU CAN'T SLEEP? Watch

untitled) - 2001 (still)



that seemed so alien and then presenting it in the mainstream media or on the street for that friction.

PL: A lot of the things that we've brought up—like dance culture, fashion, or skating—until recently were considered trivial. It was just for people who belonged to those scenes, and it wasn't easy to access the discourse around them. You had to be a member of the group. Whereas now, there's 40 fashion podcasts where I could learn more about being a



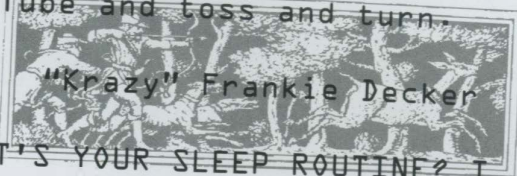
Scally: I don't have to be part of the group to dabble in it. How do you think about subculture today? Does it exist?

ML: This is kind of a theory, right? When I look back at the 20th century, I see culture as a kind of arrow. A determining arrow with this very narrow path of progressive change—the arrow demands that each decade kind of renew itself and bring novelty each time.

So for the postwar period, you get this kind of arrow of rapid progression, right? A momentum accelerated by all

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YouTube and toss and turn.



WHAT'S YOUR SLEEP ROUTINE? I usually smoke a spliff before I go to bed and fall asleep with the TV on. I'm also a semi-habitual middle-of-the-night

snacker. My girlfriend often wakes up and finds cabinet doors accidentally left open from the night before. DO YOU TAKE NAPS THROUGHOUT THE DAY? No. WHAT DO YOU TYPICALLY DREAM ABOUT? When I dream I always get this feeling that I'm in the same place I was the last time I had



these different factors, which was technological as well. It was all produced by those conditions—cheap amplifiers, cheap guitars, radio, TV.

PL: Skateboards.

ML: And then it reaches the end of the 20th century and it stops. For lots of reasons, but a big one is the internet, right?

**The internet changes time.** This movement of time gets converted into space, converted into an archive, right? So instead of things moving forward, they move across, right? And that across is almost limitless, vast.

PL: Now it's less about a monolithic history. Instead, you make your sandcastle and it gets washed away by the tide of information. And you make another sandcastle and it gets washed away, too.

ML: Yeah, exactly. That's part of the horizontality of it. It's a very different momentum.

PL: Let's talk about the work you did for the Turner Contemporary in Margate, and the *Dazzle Dark* video. Because there's something very haunting about that video. Against the backdrop of this newly gentrified seaside city, *Dazzle Dark* feels almost nightmarish in its gleefulness.

ML: Right now, in the UK, it's difficult to stand at the edge of the island and look out and feel anything approaching optimism, you know? It just seems so dark, cut off. It's developing this fortress mentality. There are boats trying to get here. It's a dark passage, you know?

PL: There are images of the dark, unknowable beyond the ocean.

ML: Exactly. That void. That sense of entropy. And also this anxiety. You know, I've been going to seaside towns since I was a small kid. These places of pleasure, overconsumption, and excess. And then you look out to the sea, and feel all these threats that are contained within the sea. The threat of the water itself, but also the threat of microplastics, small boats, and all the rest of it. And that proximity between pleasure and death—

PL: It seems like the present is really intervening and putting **so much pressure on the space of memory and nostalgia.**

ML: It's a kind of amplifier, the seaside. In the UK, it

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a dream. Like it all happens in one world: dream world. My dreams are so random, but sometimes my dreams can be problematic. And the struggle in the dream can be total fantasy, like if I'm running from something I can never move quite fast enough. Or it can be

derivative of something I've worried or thought about in real life, like an interaction/confrontation you're afraid to actually have. Dreams are cray cray. HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED ABOUT SKATING? I don't have skate dreams as often as I'd like to. Nick Michel has them



amplifies everything, the two most obvious things being melancholy and pleasure—and excess, like I say. You go to these places to lose yourself, to abandon yourself to pleasure, and fun, and entertainment. And then the next day you go down to the sea, and you become wistful about what you did the night before.

I was trying to evoke that feeling, like in a song. #

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