ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE IN BRITAIN SINCE 1989

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Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art
Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London

First published in 2019 by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art
16 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3JA
paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk

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ISBN 978-1-913107-01-7 HB
Library of Congress Control Number: 2019936785

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Designed by Julia, julia.studio
Origination by Evergreen Colour Management Ltd
Printed by Printer Trento Srl

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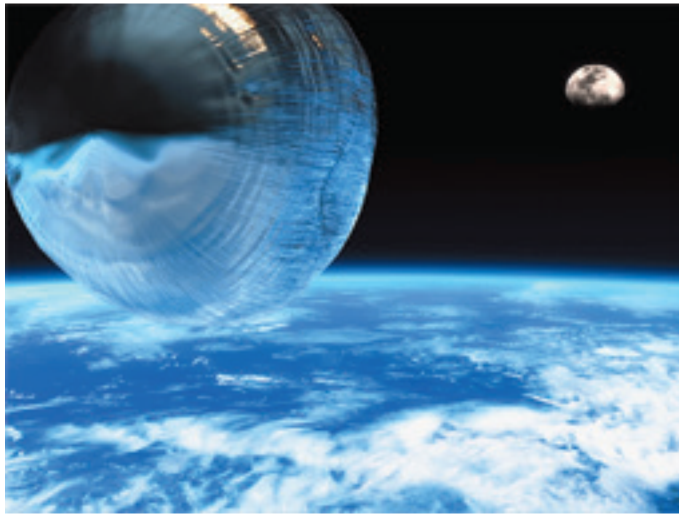
BROKEN ENGLISH: ALLEGORIES OF MEDIA RUIN IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Johanna Gosse

In the two decades since the debut of his ground-breaking video essay on British dancehall culture, *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999), and more so since winning the Turner Prize in 2008, Mark Leckey has been widely recognised as a leading figure in contemporary British art. More pointedly, he is often credited as a father figure for the so-called 'YouTube generation', a name for artists who came of age after the internet, work with digital technology and in some cases directly author their work on existing online platforms. Tellingly, Leckey's paternal relation to contemporary digital and so-called 'post-internet' art is premised on a body of work that is steeped in nostalgia for obsolescent media cultures, from *Fiorucci*'s obsessive mining of the rituals and artefacts of Northern Soul, to its unofficial sequel, *Dream English Kid 1964–1999 AD* (2015; fig. 89), a found-footage video essay in which Leckey stitches together analogue and digital source material to reconstruct memories from the first thirty-five years of his life.

Dream English Kid originated with Leckey's discovery (on YouTube, naturally) of a grainy video recording of a 1979 Joy Division performance in Liverpool that he had attended aged fifteen. Realising that the proliferation of searchable online databases of user-generated content has rendered pre-digital cultural products newly accessible, and often instantly downloadable, Leckey began compiling an audiovisual archive of what he calls 'found memories': concert footage, film clips, vintage television broadcasts, rare audio recordings and even strangers' home movies. Later, he combined these fragments into an associative, episodic and loosely chronological montage that stitches together personal and collective memories; in Leckey's phrase, his



89, 90 – Mark Leckey, *Dream English Kid, 1964–1999 AD*, 2015. HD video, 23 mins.

practice results in a 'false memoir'.[1] In what follows, I offer a close reading of *Dream English Kid* that foregrounds its allegorical over biographical significance. Positioning it alongside recent moving-image artworks by John Smith and Lawrence Lek, I argue that *Dream English Kid* offers an allegorical, critical portrait not just of the individual artist but of working-class British identity itself. Significantly, Leckey excavates this allegorical critique of identity not by debunking or demystifying mass media as mere spectacle but, rather, by cultivating an audiovisual pleasure principle rooted in the practices of consumption, appropriation and remediation that characterise cultural participation in the digital age.

Born in 1964 to a working-class family in Birkenhead, located across the River Mersey from Liverpool, the teenage Leckey attended school in nearby Ellesmere Port. There, he identified as a member of the Casuals, a working-class subculture, often associated with football hooliganism, comprised of young men who adopted designer sportswear in a subversive mimicry of upper-class leisure culture. The Italian fashion house Fiorucci was a favoured brand for the Casuals, an insider reference that inspired the title of *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore*. Like this earlier video essay, the narrative of *Dream English Kid* is anchored in the artist's personal history, beginning with his birthday in the summer of 1964. And yet, the opening scene is located far from the terra firma of English soil: rather, it is beamed in from outer space during a satellite launch. Leckey summons the suspenseful climate of the Space Age by inserting an offscreen voiceover reciting a launch countdown, which by extension also announces his own birth. The countdown is followed by a futuristic, full-colour CGI animation of a satellite floating in space, intercut with black-and-white archival footage of Sputnik-era satellites across a bay of vintage monitors (fig. 90). This toggling between past and present image technologies inspires a sense of historical vertigo that further extends and expands the narrative orbit beyond its author and into a more public, universal and shared experience of history.

Next, an intertitle stating 'June 25, 1964' marks the coincidence of Leckey's birthday and the date of that year's total lunar eclipse. These events directly preceded the 26 June release of the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* in the United States, which launched the transatlantic tide of Beatlemania.[2] Leckey pairs snippets of the album's title track (its lyrics containing a subtle pun on the 'day's night' of a total lunar eclipse) with intermittent behind-the-scenes shots of the Beatles preparing to perform on television before a live studio audience, a key scene from Richard Lester's successful 1964 film version of *A Hard Day's Night*. This convergence of the Beatles, broadcast television, popular cinema and satellite technology also makes oblique reference to the very first live, international satellite television broadcast, 'Our World', which occurred exactly three years later on 25 June 1967 and featured a performance from the band during the peak of their psychedelic, anti-war phase. Through this dense network of cultural associations, Leckey, the eponymous 'dream English kid', weaves his own historical narrative into that of Liverpool's other native sons, the Beatles. By cosmically aligning his birth date with epoch-defining events like the lunar eclipse, the 'British Invasion' and even the promise of global connectivity symbolised by satellite communications, Leckey casts himself not so much as a central protagonist

but more as the summary product of these historical and, importantly, highly mediated phenomena.

With this opening scene of interstellar Beatlemania, *Dream English Kid* establishes its central tension, the simultaneous existence yet fundamental irreconcilability of the universal (figured literally as the cosmos) and the particular (the coincidence of Leckey's birth and the Beatles' international debut, moments linked by their shared Scouse heritage). Throughout, Leckey is more committed to exploring how individual and collective memory are similarly organised according to loose patterns of association and correspondence, rather than to maintaining fidelity to historical or biographical fact. This tendency is common in Leckey's work and has led the critic Alex Kitnick to regard his project as 'everybody's autobiography', in a nod to the title of Gertrude Stein's 1937 memoir.[3] And yet, although *Dream English Kid* rehearses generic conventions that are familiar in 'everybody's autobiography', its narrative nevertheless remains doggedly bound up with the specificities of time, place and, particularly, cultural identity, which are framed through markers of gender, nationality, regionalism, musical taste, subcultural affiliation and, most explicitly and self-consciously, class. Thus, to regard Leckey's work as 'everybody's autobiography' risks obscuring how its imaginary portrait of an archetypal 'English kid' is not just culturally, historically and geographically specific but is revealed to be deeply fractured and derivative; it is a densely layered assemblage of mass-media fragments, quasi-fictional events and nostalgic fantasies, cobbled together from a dizzying range of archival sources and competing media formats. Ultimately, *Dream English Kid* is motivated by this paradox, whereby an individual's cultural specificity is inextricably tethered and cathected to the universal consumer subjectivity marshalled by mass media; and, as this essay aims to demonstrate, for Leckey, this relation is fundamentally working-class in character.

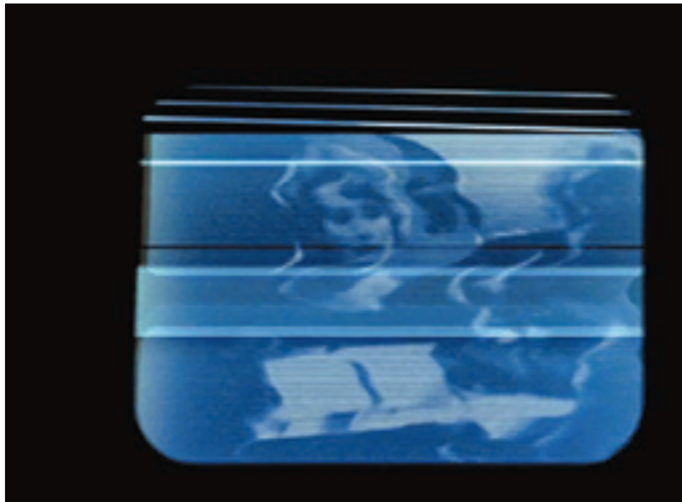
As *Dream English Kid* proceeds through Leckey's childhood and early adolescence, it combines appropriated footage with CGI enhancements to reenact his memories. In one extended sequence, a lingerie-clad blonde preens before her boudoir mirror in a digitally generated 1960s-era bedroom (fig. 91). Leckey credits the scene's source as *Carry On Cruising* (Gerald Thomas and Ralph Thomas, 1962), the sixth comedy in the *Carry On* franchise and the first one shot in colour, which starred his childhood crush, the actress Liz Fraser. Filtered and compressed through the lens of his memory, Fraser's performance in *Carry On Cruising* is conflated with a primal scene of sexual awakening, where Leckey witnessed a friend's mother undressing in her bedroom when he was eight or nine years old.[4] At one point, the woman's face disappears from the mirror reflection and is replaced by the dim silhouette of a rapt boy – young Leckey as a prurient voyeur. With its surrealist-inflected interest in memory, dreams and particularly male scopophilia, the scene recalls classic found-footage films like Joseph Cornell's blue-tinted camp homage *Rose Hobart* (1936), the awkward seated striptease that opens Bruce Conner's *A MOVIE* (1958) and the sepia-toned, oneiric haze of Conner's *TAKE THE 5:10 TO DREAMLAND* (1976). The boudoir scene concludes when Leckey's virtual memory transforms or, more accurately, is restored to its original state, a blue-tinted (and thus inadvertently Cornellian) image broadcast on a vintage television screen (fig. 92). When the TV set suddenly shuts off, perhaps on being unplugged or shorting, an offscreen male voice groans 'fuckin' hell', as if in response to the blackout – technological breakdown as coitus interruptus.[5]

Thenceforth, the chronology moves steadily through the 1970s, 80s and 90s, the passage of time marked by highlights from Leckey's biography, such as the Joy Division concert at Eric's, as well as world events such as that of the Korean Air Lines Flight 007, a commercial aircraft that trespassed into USSR airspace and was shot down by the Soviet military on 1 September 1983, prompting an international crisis that nearly brought Cold War tensions to a breaking point. To capture the heady climate of existential dread and hedonistic abandon that characterised the tail end of the Cold War, Leckey combines clips of period television news graphics illustrating the plane's trajectory with footage from dance parties and advertisements for Cinzano vermouth, followed by multiple views of wasted urban landscapes that evoke nuclear fallout. As in the opening sequence, the montage is sprinkled with found intertitles that announce specific dates, adding a curious, quasi-documentary sense of the *future anterior* to this post-apocalyptic vision that could easily have come to pass.

This forward-marching chronology suddenly halts in 1999, the year Leckey completed *Fiorucci* and was met with seemingly instant art world success. This was also the year of a total solar eclipse, to which Leckey refers through a quadriptych of vintage computer graphic interfaces (fig. 93), coupled with a faint echo of Soundgarden's grunge track 'Black Hole Sun' (1994), another eclipse pun. Together, the four-part grid and audiovisual wordplay recall the opening scene's pairing of a lunar eclipse with the Beatles' 'Hard Day's Night', bringing an additional layer of self-reference to the dream narrative. In another echo of the countdown in the video's overture, the appearance of the 1999 lunar eclipse culminates in an ominous countdown to the 'Time to Totality', a reference to the sun's total occlusion but also to the impending New Millennium, or Y2K, a potential data-driven crisis that spurred global paranoia over the collapse of digital clock and calendar time – precisely the temporal logic that *Dream English Kid* manipulates and subverts through its perpetual, quasi-solipsistic recursion.

At the final countdown's end, the screen suddenly goes black, an echo of the sudden lights-out of the earlier boudoir-television scene. Here, the narrative loops back once again to 1979, with a repetitive sequence of shots: the camera zooms in on the word 'Dream' printed in psychedelic colours, then on a short television clip of Marianne Faithfull coolly crooning the word 'English' and finally cuts to a spinning 45rpm vinyl recording of the Pretenders' 1979 single 'Kid'. Repeated twice, this brief loop haltingly articulates the work's title, *Dream English Kid*, and establishes its historical pivot as 1979, the year Leckey first saw Joy Division perform. However, in spite of this nostalgic personal reference, this concluding sequence confirms that the 'English Kid' Leckey conjures up is not a specific individual but an effect of media and, particularly, a mass-media imaginary rife with fragmentation, elision, glitch and repetition. In this sense, Leckey's memoir takes shape not as linear storytelling but as a broken record.

As a consequence of Leckey's promiscuous approach to appropriation, *Dream English Kid* is littered with an inventory of media, both old and new,



91, 92, 93, 94 – Mark Leckey, *Dream English Kid, 1964–1999 AD*, 2015. HD video, 23 mins.

from specific cultural products like vintage pop songs, degraded found footage and high-definition CGI, to the array of technical apparatuses shown on-screen, including vinyl records, radios, television sets, tape recorders, video cameras and computer interfaces. Likewise, instead of a year-by-year, encyclopaedic approach, Leckey adopts an episodic structure, with 1979 emerging as a narrative crux – the year he saw Joy Division and the release date of singles by Faithfull, the Pretenders and others sampled on the soundtrack, including 'There Goes Concorde Again' by the English post-punk group ... And the Native Hipsters.

Like the soundtrack, the video seamlessly fuses fragments of analogue and digital media, with little regard for medium or historical specificity. This techno-historical mash-up also extends to the video's projection in the gallery, where Leckey specifies the use of a video projector with a three-gun cathode ray tube (CRT), a vintage relic that adds a sculptural dimension to the installation.[6] Towards the end of the video, a brief glimpse of a CRT projector's red, green and blue lenses appears in a grainy video clip, a moment of analogue media reflexivity that, somewhat counter-intuitively, was facilitated by digital search engines like YouTube, the source of much of Leckey's material. Paralleling this ecumenical, anachronistic approach to media, the video's narrative roves freely through various locations and spaces, many associated with working-class life (housing estates, dingy squats, dilapidated commercial zones) or with the subcultures that young Leckey participated in (dimly lit dance clubs, record shops) and, perhaps most hauntingly, three-dimensional architectural models of a squalid, graffiti-covered motorway underpass, an image loaded with significance in his psyche.[7] Most of these sites are shown in states of decline or disrepair and, presumably, have since been repurposed, abandoned or destroyed as a result of gentrification and development, a reality that charges their presence here with melancholy and loss.

Although *Dream English Kid* is deeply nostalgic, the motivations behind this nostalgia are more anxious or, in Leckey's words, 'fretful', than simply sentimental; Leckey admits to 'wallow[ing] in the mire of nostalgia' for the sake of 'exorcism', in order to unburden himself of lingering memories.[8] This nostalgic sensibility is especially potent when Leckey inserts himself into narratives directly or by proxy, whether by animating his scatological childhood drawings into hilariously grotesque cartoons, including 16mm home movies of an eponymous 'English kid' or, most jarringly, when we see a faint trace of his middle-aged visage reflected on a computer screen, layered atop the ghostly video silhouette of Joy Division's front man, Ian Curtis, performing only months before his suicide. Leckey thus uses nostalgia as a means of braiding his individual narrative into the dominant cultural mythologies of the late twentieth century – and in doing so, he casts himself as both an everyday 'English kid' and, like Curtis, a tragic subcultural hero (fig. 94).

To regard Leckey as an avuncular figure in relation to new media and post-internet art is generationally consistent with the fact that he is far from a digital native and was well into his thirties by the time the internet became an everyday commonplace in the mid- to late 1990s. Although *Fiorucci* anticipates the cultural and formal logic of digital remix culture and the YouTube 'mashup' or 'supercut', the video was in fact the result of a painstaking research process in which Leckey mailed out written requests for VHS recordings to television studios and archives, then digitised and edited them on his desktop. By contrast, the images in *Dream English Kid* were either sourced from the internet or fabricated with digital software. Despite these differing means of production, both works harness a notion of authenticity that is more a symptom of experiential and affective intensity than of the historical accuracy or documentary truth-value of particular media platforms.[9] No matter what technologies are used, in Leckey's work, the act of recovering memories is a process shot through with fragility and incompleteness, perpetually vulnerable to fragmentation – all hallmarks of the allegorical impulse. As an allegorist, rather than a documentarian, Leckey is less interested in the evidentiary status or authentic source of these cultural relics as values in themselves – whether analogue or digital, originating in an official archive, discovered on YouTube or digitally manufactured – than he is concerned with what kind of mood and feeling these assembled memoirs generate and the ways that they capture and refract collective historical experience.

This allegorical impulse has a rich history in modern and contemporary art and aesthetic criticism, particularly in moving image art. One of allegory's greatest champions was Walter Benjamin, whose writings on topics such as the German tragic drama, the late nineteenth-century Parisian arcades and the poetry of Charles Baudelaire sought to recover an allegorical impulse that he considered unfairly neglected, denigrated and repressed within modernity. Since Benjamin, allegory has periodically returned to the forefront of art and cultural criticism – for instance, in the art historian Thomas Crow's recent history of Pop art as an allegorical practice, where Andy Warhol figures as its most adept (if unexpected) practitioner.[10] Allegorical approaches reached particular prominence in contemporary art in the decade after Pop art's late-1960s decline, within the philosophical and cultural reception of postmodernism in the mid- to late 1970s. This field is still closely identified with the work of the theorist Fredric Jameson, who adapted Benjamin's terms for his analysis of art and culture under late capitalism.[11] Similarly, the critic Craig Owens took up a Benjaminian treatment of allegory to analyse certain postmodernist strategies in the field of contemporary art. Writing in 1980, Owens's two-part essay 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism' defines allegory as an archetypal postmodern aesthetic strategy that is marked by an attraction 'to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete – an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin, which Benjamin identified as the allegorical emblem par excellence'.[12]

Citing the Greek etymology of allegory, '*allos* = other + *agoreuei* = to speak', Owens defines allegory as a process that occurs 'whenever one text is doubled by another' and, more specifically, when 'one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest'.[13] The allegorist, then, 'does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter'. He or she

> does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another

meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement. This is why allegory is condemned, but it is also the source of its theoretical significance.[14]

Ultimately, Owens argues, the allegorical impulse relates to the 'capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear' and is thus inherently redemptive.[15]

Writing in the same vein and at about the same time as Owens, the art historian and critic Benjamin Buchloh similarly identified allegory as a key strategy in contemporary art that recuperates historical avant-garde practices like the Surrealist found object and Dada photomontage.[16] Like Owens, who emphasised the trace, the fragment and the ruin as exemplary allegorical signs, Buchloh identifies this impulse in contemporary art through the presence of particular 'allegorical procedures'. These include appropriation, which Buchloh says enacts 'the depletion of the confiscated image'; superimposition, or 'the doubling of a visual text by a second text'; and fragmentation, which signals 'the shift of attention and reading to the framing device'.[17] Together, Buchloh argues, these aesthetic strategies lay bare and demystify the relations of production, especially in postmodern appropriation and video practices that utilise the detritus of the culture industry.

Owens and Buchloh's diagnoses of the allegorical impulse in the postmodernist art of the late 1970s provide a compelling framework for Leckey's practice, which, though initiated decades later, remains invested in archetypical postmodern strategies like appropriation, fragmentation, superimposition and montage and, as we have seen, is deeply invested in the period of the late 70s as a cultural touchstone. Indeed, Leckey's videos bear striking structural and thematic similarities to another highly allegorical video essay that, not coincidentally, also hails from 1979: Dan Graham's *Rock My Religion*. Like *Fiorucci* and *Dream English Kid*, Graham's work similarly charts alternative cultural genealogies for working-class subcultures; *Rock My Religion* performs this genealogy by tracing the anti-authoritarian, ecstatic impulses of American punk rock back to the Shakers, a long-extinct eighteenth-century English Protestant religious sect. Graham frames his argument through an unlikely comparison between the bohemian punk poet Patti Smith and the mysterious mystic and Shaker messiah Ann Lee.[18] Much as Leckey casts Marianne Faithfull (and also the Pretenders' Chrissie Hynde) as the oracular heroine of 'Broken English', at once beguiling and threatening the heroic figure of the English kid, Graham similarly identified Lee and Smith as quasi-messianic feminine archetypes positioned between iconoclastic spirituality and working-class subculture. Significantly, both Faithfull and Smith were exceptional among 1970s female rock singer-songwriters in their direct identification with working-class identity and labour, themes that traditionally have been dominated by male rock 'n' rollers and, especially in the UK, by the so-called Angry Young Men of the 1950s and 60s.

If Leckey's videos adhere closely to descriptions of the allegorical impulse initially identified by Benjamin, they also mark a critical departure from (or revision of) one of the latter's most often cited aesthetic theories, namely, the decline of the aura in the age of mechanical reproduction. Instead, both *Fiorucci* and *Dream English Kid* demonstrate how mechanical reproduction, under the banner of allegory, can actually recuperate rather than simply diminish aura, especially when brought into contact with obsolescent or decaying media.[19] If, for Benjamin, the defining characteristics of 'auratic art' are uniqueness, distance and ritual, Leckey 're-auraticises' analogue media, both as content and apparatus, by revealing their status as rare, decaying artefacts and rituals of lost or historically distant working-class subcultures, like Northern Soul and the Casuals. This is an aura premised precisely on repetition, reproducibility and on a temporal distance amplified by historicity rather than by physical or geographic remoteness; in other words, an aura borne specifically of the logic of technological reproduction instead of in resistance to it.[20] In this sense, Leckey uses one Benjaminian concept – allegorical procedures – to contradict another – the decline of the aura – in an attempt to assuage anxiety over historical and cultural loss. Yet, even as Leckey marshals an excess of archival evidence to retrieve a lost sense of unity, coherence, belonging and plenitude, to fill in or smooth over gaps of memory, the result suggests that these sensations were never present in the first place, that the English kid's dream was always already 'broken', a fractured fantasy projection just like the spectral image of Leckey layered atop Ian Curtis, his face obscured in shadow.

Dream English Kid registers a variety of anxieties, pertaining to history, identity and class, all prevalent within postwar art and particularly British postwar art, perhaps most notably in British Pop. Writing in 1969, the critic and curator John Russell distinguished the political dimensions of English Pop from its American variant, framing this distinction in terms of an allegorical class struggle: 'On the English side … Pop was a resistance movement: a classless commando which was directed against the art-Establishment … Pop was meant as a cultural break, signifying the firing-squad, without mercy or reprieve'. Russell continues:

> Pop in England was … a facet of a class-struggle, real or imagined. It was a struggle fought by people who were for science against the humanities, for cybernetics against the revival of italic handwriting, for Elvis against pre-electric recordings of Battistini, for American Army surplus fatigues against waistcoats and watch chains, for the analytical study of General Motors advertising against an hour in the print-room at Colnaghi's. Pop did not count 'ephemeral' as an insult. It was for the present, and even more for the future: it was not for the past, and saw nothing to regret in the changes which had come about in England since 1945.[21]

Arguing that the attitude of English Pop reflects a stricter separation between high and low culture and a more hierarchical class system, Russell clarifies how and why the aesthetic impulses and cultural politics of the Independent Group – which included Richard Hamilton, Alison and Peter Smithson, Eduardo Paolozzi and John McHale – differed from their American counterparts, who viewed mass culture as more of a native tradition than

95 – Mark Leckey, *Dream English Kid, 1964–1999 AD*, 2015. HD video, 23 mins.

an exotic foreign import. In short, Russell argues that it was the rigidity of the British class structure that endowed English Pop with a sharper edge of class antagonism, which also helps to account for the movement's transatlantic vicissitudes.

Elsewhere, Russell singles out the 'huge new cinemas' commissioned and built by the Odeon chain owner Oscar Deutsch during the 1930s, flagging them as key sites in the construction of British working-class cultural identity:

> Cultivated people just knew where they were, as between one and the other, just as they knew where they were as between Lutyens's New Delhi and the huge new cinemas which were being designed by Harry W. Weedon. There was a higher life and a lower one and from the font onwards people were destined for one or the other.[22]

With stark clarity, Russell maps the English class system metonymically onto two architectural sites that are geographically remote but both from the interwar era. The former, Edwin Lutyens's classical redesign of the imperial Indian capital, symbolises the enduring survival of aristocratic high culture by and through the economic apparatus of empire, whereas the latter, Weedon's Art Deco designs for the Odeon cinema franchise, symbolises the linked forces of modern urbanisation, mass cultural consumption and working-class leisure.

As an English art critic writing in the wake of sequential global wars and postcolonial resistance, Russell associates his native Pop art with an effort to radically disrupt and destabilise a clear high/low class hierarchy wherein 'cultivated people just knew where they were'.[23] The high/low antagonism that characterised English Pop resurfaces in Leckey's video essays, where it is allegorically subsumed into rivalries between older and newer media and an almost lurid fascination with physical sites and social rituals, mostly working-class in origin, that have become obsolete, ruined or are fading from view. As a digital sequel to *Fiorucci*'s analogue nostalgia, *Dream English Kid* utilises CGI and other digital effects that distort and embellish visual recollections, infusing them with fantasy projection and myth; here, the digital interface functions more like a cracked or rose-tinted lens than a transparent window onto history. Allegory emerges as Leckey's primary tool for sifting through the vast annals of digital memory, situating him as a twenty-first-century inheritor of both the Independent Group and postmodern appropriation and video art's allegorical investigations of mass culture in the early to mid-1950s and the late 1970s respectively. Most significantly, by allegorising the relations between mass culture, subculture and class identity, Leckey's video memoir insists on an attitude of (class) antagonism, fragmentation and loss, at the expense of (class) reconciliation, narrative plenitude or redemption. If his work qualifies as autobiography, it is an autobiography in ruins (fig. 95).

The Odeon cinemas that for John Russell serve as metonyms for the British working class similarly fascinate the British artist and film-maker John Smith, whose body of work offers an even more salient precedent for Leckey's practice than American found-footage film and video by the likes of Cornell, Conner or Graham. In Smith's best-known film, 1976's *The Girl Chewing*

96, 97 – John Smith, *The Man Phoning Mum*, 2011. HD video, 12 mins.

Gum, the Odeon serves as an allegorical site, a soon-to-be ruin, its existence and imminent decline telegraphing social and economic transformations in British culture. Consisting of just two shots over twelve minutes, this 16mm black-and-white film surveys a typical street corner in Dalston, a formerly working-class East End London neighbourhood that has since undergone gentrification, initially at the hand of artists (like Smith) but more recently by affluent urban professionals. Stationed on a tripod, Smith's camera captures groups of schoolchildren, labourers, businessmen, housewives and the eponymous 'girl chewing gum' as they hurry past. Heard but unseen, Smith takes on the role of narrator, describing the appearances, behaviours and actions of the passers-by, yet his voiceover typically precedes the events' occurrence on screen, an indication that something is amiss. Barked in an imperative tone, Smith's voiceover functions more like the directions of a domineering auteur than the running commentary of a narrator. The camera gradually pans to the exterior of the Dalston Odeon, where it lingers to inspect a small queue of mostly women and children forming outside. Close scrutiny of the Odeon's marquee reveals the name of the feature screening that day, *The Land That Time Forgot* (Kevin Connor, 1975), a title that, when viewed in the wake of the Dalston's dramatic gentrification, foreshadows the economic and historical changes on the horizon and the cultural losses incurred.

In 2011, Smith produced an update to *The Girl Chewing Gum* called *The Man Phoning Mum*, which superimposes colour digital video footage of the same street corner in contemporary Dalston over the original black-and-white footage from 1976 (fig. 96). A filmic palimpsest, *The Man Phoning Mum* reveals striking changes to the cityscape and its inhabitants. Gone are former landmarks like the large rooftop clock and, notably, the Odeon, which has been replaced by a large brick building. The most striking change in the thirty-five years between the films, however, is not so much the physical environment as the behaviours of the passers-by, the majority of whom are captured staring at or conversing on mobile phones while they walk the streets. Smith acknowledges this shift by re-casting his former protagonist, the girl chewing gum, as a man lingering outside a shop and chatting on his mobile (presumably, with his mum).

The Man Phoning Mum retains Smith's original voiceover but renders it strangely redundant: in a time when daily life is constantly reported, tracked, shared and narrated via satellites, big data analytics and social media, when you can call your mother while running errands, the authority once embodied in the off-screen narration has been fully absorbed by the invisible omni-presence of algorithms and metadata. Likewise, why queue outside the cinema as Dalston residents did in the 1970s when you can stream the latest movies on your mobile phone during your daily commute? Once the camera pans to the Odeon's former location, where small crowds once gathered for *The Land That Time Forgot*, we are now met with a brick wall behind an iron fence, literal and figurative barriers to this social pastime; here, the (digital) present plainly inhibits, rather than illuminates, the full recovery of the (analogue) past.

From Dalston in 1976 to Dalston in 2011, analogue to digital, cinema to smartphone, Smith's superimpositions consolidate rather than alleviate the pervasive sense of tension and rivalry between these historical moments.

Like Leckey, Smith adopts a life-cycle of thirty-five years for his sequel, formally reproducing the idea of a 'generation gap'; whereas Leckey's narrative spans the Space Age to Y2K, Smith's moves from the queue outside the Odeon to droves of smartphone addicts. Stripped of its social significance, the cinema is now simply one potential application of the ubiquitous hand-held device that structures and narrates the daily activities of the atomised urban subject. Rather than demystify or romanticise the ruined (however recent) past, views of the present in Smith's film render the past even more opaque and distant, and vice versa (fig. 97). In this sense, *The Man Phoning Mum* frames the relation between the analogue past and digital present as fraught with anxiety, rupture and incompatibility, a historical chasm that remains irreparably broken.

In contrast to Leckey and Smith's focus on the pre-history of the present moment, the artist Lawrence Lek surveys a similar terrain and set of historical concerns through a decidedly more futuristic lens. Allegories of broken Englishness abound in Lek's virtual simulations, which combine the dystopian humour of Smith's films with the melancholic sincerity of Leckey's videos. Lek's 2016 work *Europa, Mon Amour (2016 Brexit Edition)* is a high-definition video game simulation that navigates the ruined landscape of post-Brexit London (fig. 98). The work is a slightly modified sequel to the earlier *Dalston, Mon Amour* (2015), which was initially exhibited as an interactive site-specific installation on Dalston's Gillett Square and is described by Lek as a commentary on 'the collective amnesia brought about by perpetual redevelopment in Dalston'.[24] In both the pre- and post-Brexit versions of the simulation, the viewer adopts the role of a first-person video game user, venturing through the devastated terrain of a depopulated neighbourhood ravaged by real estate speculation and gentrification. In the second version, this wasteland is reimagined as the post-apocalyptic fallout of Brexit.

As fictional, fragmented worlds designed to redress 'collective amnesia', Lek's simulations are deeply allegorical texts; more specifically, they are 'allegorithms', a term formulated by the digital theorist Alex Galloway to describe how video games function as allegories of control that work 'in direct synchronisation with the political realities of the informatics age'.[25] Lek's 'allegorithms' are particularly transparent and use hyperbole and parody to variously comic and dystopian effect. The Dalston of *Europa Mon Amour* is depicted as a string of ghostly, abandoned islands, as if the player were visiting a disused tropical resort. There are no human inhabitants save for a talking-head news anchor reporting on the Brexit referendum via a flatscreen monitor. In a striking parallel to *The Girl Chewing Gum*, Lek's simulation visits the exterior of another historic Art Deco theatre on Kingsland Road, the Rio Cinema, its facade self-reflexively announcing a screening of *Europa, Mon Amour* to produce a cinematic *mise-en-abyme*. Lek posts UK and European Union flags outside the Rio's entrance, as if the building had once been converted into an ambassadorial or bureaucratic headquarters, only to be abandoned post-Brexit. Although the Rio appears bombed out or demolished, with its rubble-strewn interior exposed to the street and overgrown with palm trees, the show apparently must go on, for inside there is a screening of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959) playing to an empty house. In the wake of Dalston's gentrification, the Rio, once a site of urban

98 – Lawrence Lek, *Europa, Mon Amour (2016 Brexit Edition)*, 2016. HD video and open-world game, 14 mins.

working-class culture, had been transformed into an art-house monument to highbrow continental culture, signalled by the EU flag waving outside and the Left Bank feature screening inside; post-Brexit, it lies in ruins.

After leaving the Rio, Lek's simulation absorbs the English-language subtitles to the morose French dialogue from Resnais's film. But on arriving at a deserted pool hall wallpapered with Turkish beer logos, *Hiroshima*'s subtitles are supplanted by untranslated Mandarin characters, perhaps a nod to the persistence of globalisation despite the Leave campaign's efforts to impose a racially and linguistically homogenous vision of British national identity. From *Dalston, Mon Amour*'s paean to a rapidly gentrifying London, to *Europa, Mon Amour*'s dystopian allegory of post-Brexit London, Lek's series envisions a despairingly pessimistic vision of contemporary British society as riven by the dual forces of neoliberal economic policy and political reaction. And, by adapting the title of Resnais's film, Lek even suggests an unsettling comparison between the atomic fallout of Hiroshima and the economic and political fallout of Brexit, two 'post' moments that are linked historically by the birth and death of the European project.

In Leckey, Smith and Lek's works, images of broken and abandoned sites – Eric's Club, the dilapidated highway underpass, the streets of once working-class neighbourhoods, the Odeon and the Rio – function as metonymic signifiers for a fading and deteriorated concept of British identity in ruins. Whereas Leckey and Smith produce palimpsests of analogue and digital ruins, Lek's fully gamified environment is less a palimpsest than a virtual ruin, in which the Rio is shown literally broken in half, its interior revealed as vacated of the audiences that once queued outside, as seen at the Odeon in Smith's 1976 film.[26] Yet, whereas Smith and Lek's works characterise the relationship between older and newer media in terms of violent rupture and incoherence – technological breakdown as an allegory of social and cultural breakdown – Leckey creates a more fluid, continuous montage of old and new, one authorised by his experience not as a digital native but as a nostalgic allegorist who embraces these contradictions.

Dream English Kid compulsively returns to 1979, the year that Marianne Faithfull sang 'What are you fighting for?', her lyrics conjuring a 'broken' English identity, contaminated by Russian and German inflection, twin markers of an unsentimental postwar European cosmopolitanism and lingering Cold War order.[27] The late 1970s in Britain was a period marked by economic crisis, incessant labour strikes and terrorist threats; 1979, the historical crux of *Dream English Kid*'s soundtrack, was also the year in which Thatcher was elected Prime Minister and started to implement a neoliberal economic agenda that endures into the present. Thus, if Leckey's work manifests an ongoing nostalgic preoccupation with working-class English identity, its purpose is not to mourn the loss of a supposedly coherent and authentic subjectivity but, rather, to reveal the ways that this identity has been subject to fragmentation and instability. It was always just a 'dream'. For Leckey, 'broken English' signifies an identity that reinvents and renovates itself through constant self-reference and cultural feedback. As with the broken and fading cinemas in Smith and Lek's dream-like visions of London (notably, playing American and French films), the 'English kid' that Leckey imagines is already, from the very start, a provisional, impure and fractured idea. Like the record skipping in *Dream English Kid*'s finale, this is an idea of Englishness that is irretrievably broken, no matter how many times we repeat it. And yet, if Leckey's is a portrait of subjectivity in ruins, for the allegorist, ruins are never simply sites of loss and forgetting; just like the abandoned beach-beneath-the-streets of Lek's Dalston, or an old video discovered on YouTube, ruins are fertile ground from which new memories, and new futures, can emerge.

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1 'Biennial artist Mark Leckey creates "false memoir"', BBC News online, 14 July 2016, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-36765758.

2 The UK release of *A Hard Day's Night* post-dated the US release by two weeks, on 10 July 1964: see www.beatlesbible.com/albums/a-hard-days-night/.

3 Alex Kitnick, 'Everybody's Autobiography', *Mark Leckey: On Pleasure Bent* (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2015), 210–38.

4 Correspondence from Mark Leckey to the author, 26 September 2017.

5 The voice is in fact a recording of the Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham, which Leckey calls a 'quintessentially seventies "Fuckin' Hell"'; ibid.

6 Leckey explains his rationale for using CRT projectors: 'I always show it on that type. The reason is that the analogue projection is much more sympathetic to the found footage [than] digital would be. Digital is too sharp, too good, it shows up all the artefacts and compression in video that has been ripped from DVDs or downloaded from YouTube. The CRT softens it and makes it more uniform'; ibid.

7 This motorway overpass is the subject of a 2017 installation, *Affect Bridge Age Regression*, shown at London's Cubitt Gallery, which features a six-foot scale model and a throbbing audio installation.

8 Mark Leckey, 'Mark Leckey – "I Wallow in the Mire of Nostalgia"', video produced for 'TateShots', uploaded 26 October 2016, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=CATey5LcEF4.

9 Erika Balsom notes a 'new fetish for the authentic function as a significant, if sometimes spurious, post-digital cultural formation' (68), in her 'Against the Novelty of New Media: The Resuscitation of the Authentic', in *You Are Here: Art after the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester and London: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2015), 66–77.

10 See Thomas Crow, *The Long March of Pop: Art, Music and Design, 1930–1995* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014).

11 See e.g. Fredric Jameson, 'Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: Dog Day Afternoon as a Political Film', *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 35–54. Another influential consideration of allegory on experimental moving-image practice is offered by David E. James, *Allegories of Cin-*

ema: American Film in the Sixties (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 12, who argues that 'film not only speaks of what it is, it speaks of what it is not, it speaks of its other. Even as it encodes its own mode of production, every alternative film practice encodes its position in respect to the dominant mode of production, to the mass media ...Every film is thus an allegory of a cinema'. More recently, Erika Balsom has offered an allegorical interpretation of the contemporary phenomena of cinema in the gallery, arguing that cinema appears in the contemporary art context as a 'ruin': 'A Cinema in the Gallery, a Cinema in Ruins', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 4 (Winter 2009), 411–27. My argument here is clearly indebted to these authors.

12 See Craig Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism', *October*, vol. 12 (Spring 1980), 70.

13 Ibid., 69.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 68.

16 Benjamin Buchloh, 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum* (September 1982): 43–56.

17 Ibid., 46.

18 For a critique of Graham's work see Kodwo Eshun, *Dan Graham: Rock My Religion* (London: MIT Press/Afterall, 2012).

19 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version', in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, ed. Michael William Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 19–55. My use of the concept 'auraticisation' is aligned with Jackson Lears's description of Joseph Cornell's boxes as 're-auraticisation' in Jackson Lears, 'A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society', *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 38–60.

20 Of numerous variations on this argument in writings on appropriation in avant-garde film and video, influential examples include Lucas Hilderbrand, 'Grainy Days and Mondays: Superstar and Bootleg Aesthetics', *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), 161–90, Laura U. Marks, 'Loving a Disappearing Image', *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 91–110, and William C. Wees, 'The Ambiguous Aura of Hollywood Stars in Avant-Garde Found-Footage Films', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 41, no. 2 (1 January 2002), 3–18. I borrow the phrase 'ambiguous aura' from Wees.

21 John Russell, 'Introduction', in *Pop Art Redefined*, ed. John Russell and Suzi Gablik (New York: Praeger, 1969), 31. This sense of cultural rupture distinguished English from American Pop, which signified more of an artistic break from Abstract Expressionism than a cultural break per se. 'In America Pop meant not a cultural break, in any broad sense, but cultural continuity. But it did mean a very sharp break with the kind of art that had dominated the American scene for ten years or more and brought America, for the first time, to the forefront of art. It was an internal break, and one which many people construed as treachery' (ibid.).

22 Ibid., 25. For more on the history of Deutsch's Odeon cinema chain, see Jonathan Glancey, 'The Mogul's Monuments: How Oscar Deutsch's Odeon Cinemas taught Britain to love Modern Architecture', *The Guardian*, 18 May 2002, www.theguardian.com/arts/critic/feature/0,1169,717532,00.html.

23 Within Russell's psycho-geography of post-war British class identity, Lutyens's New Delhi stands in stark opposition to the newsagents and Odeon cinemas of working-class London, regardless of their actual geographic remoteness or proximity. This dualistic vision of colonial and aristocratic versus domestic working-class life completely excludes the cultural and identity politics of race, ethnicity and, of course, gender. As British cultural theorists from Stuart Hall to Paul Gilroy have amply demonstrated, race is the dominant 'modality in which class is "lived", the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and "fought through"': Stuart Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr, Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 55; see also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press and Verso, 1993) and Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

24 Lawrence Lek, from his website, http://lawrencelek.com/post/141368127821/dalston-mon-amour-by-lawrence-lek-bonus-levels, May 2015.

25 Alexander R. Galloway, 'Playing the Code: Allegories of Control in *Civilization*', *Radi-*

cal Philosophy, no. 128 (November/December 2004), 35, arguing that 'video games deliver to the player the power relationships of informatics media first-hand, choreographed into a multivalent cluster of play activities. In fact, in their very core, video games present the political realities of computerisation in relatively unmediated form. They solve the problem of political control, not by sublimating it as does the cinema, but by *making it coterminous with the entire game*. In this way video games achieve a unique type of political transparency' [emphasis original]. Galloway expands on his reading of media allegory in *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 54, defining the interface as an 'allegorical device that will help us gain some perspective on culture in the age of information'. Drawing from Fredric Jameson, Galloway traces the existence of a 'control allegory' (ix) across various artefacts of digital culture.

26 Lek's *Dalston* and *Europa, Mon Amour* comprise two chapters in a series of digital simulations that Lek calls *Bonus Levels*, a winking reference to video-game terminology for surplus accumulation.

27 In her book *Faithfull: An Autobiography* (London: Cooper Square Press, 1994), Faithfull remarks that 'Broken English' was inspired by the scrambled English subtitles in a documentary on the Baader Meinhof group.

PART II

pp. 227–235
Josephine Lanyon – Bristol Mean Time

1 The commission of *Island* also formed part of a gallery exhibition that toured to venues including the Fox Talbot Museum in Wiltshire, Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool and Porto, Portugal.

2 Venues for 'Ghosting' included Dartington College of Arts (2003), Spacex, Exeter, and Aspex, Portsmouth (2004), Chapter, Cardiff (2006) and Angel Row, Nottingham (2006), with additional events and film programmes at the Arnolfini and Watershed, Bristol (2006).

3 Penalva's *The White Nightingale* was part of 'Thinking of the Outside: New Art and the City of Bristol', produced in collaboration with the public art agency Situations across Bristol over six weeks in 2005. The work was shown in a specially constructed retro cinema in the St Nicholas Markets with the idea that audiences might stumble across this fairy-tale-like fable while shopping in that historic trading quarter of the city.

pp. 237–247
Elisabetta Fabrizi – 'Is this cinema? Am I right to go on trying?'

1 Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Kerry Brougher, 'Hall of Mirrors' in *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film since 1945*, ed. Kerry Brougher (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), 69.

2 Vincent Porter, *On Cinema* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), 139–40.

3 For information on the full BFI Gallery programme see Elisabetta Fabrizi, ed., *The BFI Gallery Book* (London: BFI, 2011).

4 Paolo Cherchi Usai, 'Charter of Curatorial Values', in *Film Curatorship: Archives, Museums, and the Digital Marketplace*, ed. Paolo Cherchi et al. (Vienna: Oesterreichisches Filmmuseum, 2008), 146.

6 Whenever contractually possible, a viewing copy of each of the commissioned works was then deposited in the BFI National Film Archive, enriching its artists' moving image holdings.

7 Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, in conversation with the author at the Kate MacGarry Gallery, London, 18 April 2015.

8 Mark Nash, 'Questions of Practice', *What Makes a Great Exhibition*, ed. Paula Marincola (London: Reaktion, 2014), 152.

9 This work by Jane and Louise Wilson was initially commissioned by Animate! Projects for their website and took a gallery form when the BFI became a partner in the project. For