

# Le Moment Fabriqué

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VIDEO ONLINE

<https://newmedia.dfk-paris.org/butler.html>

*Le Moment Fabriqué*

Duration: 4:19 min

HD-Video 1080p, Stereo Audio, in French with English subtitles

Edition | 3 + 1 A.P. Courtesy of the artist

The work *Le Moment Fabriqué* (2017) that I have contributed to this project stems from a series I produced over a number of years entitled *Down and Out in Los Santos* (2016–2019). The series explores the digital city of Los Santos, a simulation of Los Angeles that makes up the playable environment of the video game Grand Theft Auto V (GTAV). Using an in-game smartphone camera feature, I explored parts of the narrative periphery of this digital world, photographing the lives of the nonplayable characters (NPCs) that make up the homeless population of Los Santos.

For readers unfamiliar with “in-game photography,” this refers to a decades-old modality that involves screenshotting a video game vista or, in recent years, using in-game camera features to record imagery in the digital world. These simulated cameras are often bound to the in-game digital bodies of the



1 Alan Butler, *Le Moment Fabriqué*, 2017, HD-Video 1080p, Stereo Audio, 4:19 min, screen capture



2 Alan Butler, *Le Moment Fabriqué*, 2017, HD-Video 1080p, Stereo Audio, 4:19 min, screen capture



3 Alan Butler, *Le Moment Fabriqué*, 2017, HD-Video 1080p, Stereo Audio, 4:19 min, screen capture

players, much like the cameras attached to the bodies of physical-world photographers. They often also come with features allowing for things like optical zoom, aperture/depth-of-field, exposure, and so on. In a game such as GTAV – what is known as an “open-world” game, meaning that players are not bound to a strict linear gameplay narrative – the in-game camera feature is part of what allows players to explore the digital environment on their own terms.

My journey towards the project *Down and Out in Los Santos* was born out of my time as a gamer, more so than as an artist. I played GTAV for eighteen months before noticing the population of homeless NPCs living in Los Santos. In fact, there are multiple populations of homeless NPCs in the game, including anti-capitalist communes inspired by the Occupy Wall Street movement. None of these features in the game’s main narrative, per se. As I photographed the homeless NPCs’ bodies, behaviours, shelters, fires, beds, and various paraphernalia, it became clear to me that their existence on the periphery of this simulated society was a tragic reflection of our own physical society in late capitalism. Back in ‘reality’ – where our externally-imposed obsessions with labour, career, and objectification work in the interest of capital – the system produces winners and losers. Those of us privileged enough to exist in the former category experience the latter as relegated to the periphery of our built environment, our vision, and our consciousness. This underlying tragedy of GTAV – that in order to produce a simulation of sufficient plausibility it must include abject human misery – and what could be interpreted as the game’s Marxist critique of social hegemony led me to explore the performative mode of production that treats these digital game worlds as if they are part of space itself, rather than virtual.

Specifically, I read video games as a new form of social realism: a set of ideological systems that have been constructed to implicate and restrict the player in allocated modes of quasi-autonomy. I thus embarked on a series of works in which I produce cultural materials inside these simulated environments, as if these spaces are as real as our physical, breathing world. To do this, I perform in specific vernacular modes – for example, as street photographer, cyanotype botanist, film producer, etc. The outcomes vary as material objects, digital objects, social media feeds, temporal performances, and spatial installations.

*Le Moment Fabriqué* revisits the format and subject of photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson’s film *The Decisive Moment* (1973), which is structured around an interview with Cartier-Bresson himself. I draw upon Cartier-Bresson’s approach to the production of street photography and apply this to the simulated space and community of digital creatures in GTAV. My ‘versioning’ is also somewhat inspired by the practice of the late artist Elaine Sturtevant, in that the outcome straddles a fissure between our digitally mediated reality and the algorithmic and procedural representation of this reality. This fissure is not itself produced by a work like *Le Moment Fabriqué*, rather it is an already-existing tear in an imaginary line that divides the physical world from digital space. This line

is still observable, at least at the time of writing this. The ‘wonk’ of the current state of simulation technology is something that reminds us of our cartographical perspective – that at this moment there still is an observable dividing line between the two realms! The more we give our lives over to digital spaces, be they three-dimensional simulations or social media streams, the more our view of the world is situated looking out from the fissure in the line between the virtual/simulated and the ‘real.’ The future is at this fissure: a two-way exchange between the real and its digital counterpart in an irreversible cross-contamination of two previously distinct realms. The short film included in this project is one among a constellation of works I have produced observing this fissure using preexisting art-making modalities in an attempt to capture the current moment in the trajectory of our social realism. Other projects of mine that engage this subject include *Virtual Cyanotype Botany* (2017–2020) and *On Exactitude in Science* (2017).